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THE WIND IS RISING

THE WIND IS RISING

By

H. M. TOMLINSON

"Alas, yes! a whole world to remake. . . . For all is wrong, and gone out of joint; the inward spiritual, and the outward economical; head or heart, there is no soundness in it. As indeed, evils of all sorts are more or less of kin, and do usually go together: especially it is an old truth that wherever huge physical evil is, there, as the parent and origin of it, has moral evil to a proportionate extent been."

CARLYLE: *History of the French Revolution.*

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August 1939

OMENS

August 1939: We hear nothing from Berlin but the music of marrow-bones and cleavers. We are weary of it. The dire cries and antics which have kept Europe in commotion for years, and can mean only that Germany is possessed, must be ended. But how? We recoil from the thought of war; yet this deadening uproar must not go on. It checks the hand of every man at his task. Growth is stopped. Europe is at a stand, held by an appalling noise. There is never a day of quiet. There has been no quiet for years. For years most words that have come from Europe seemed aimed to stun us. If Americans were as near the din of the German gun foundry as we are they would hear it better. We keep a hope that it will lessen, that it will pass, but hope is all but gone. We have hardly any hope, since the uproar is louder than ever. What is going on in Nazi councils I meet nobody who can guess; apparently no sane person knows. Whitehall does not know. Of one thing only are we certain; we know that whatever the surging of German and Italian ambitions may mean, Neville Chamberlain is not the man to read it. Rectitude in municipal affairs can be left with him, but probably

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an epidemic of malignant mania is not to be audited as you would a corporation balance-sheet.

*

Reason has steadied us hitherto after each brutal assault on the understanding. Just a little more patience! What we hear over there, we tell ourselves, is lunacy. We are watching the delusions of self-exaltation. If it is not that, what is it? And lunacy is never right. How long, we ask doubtfully, can this phase last? The queer thing is—though it is only another symptom of the disease—those corybantic furies in the distance, and their name is legion, shout at us as if they alone know the true word, and men of peace are fools. So how convince them of the excellence of reason? There you see our problem; and then remember that this anarchy is in the street next to us. For ten years past, febrile unreason, of the size of a great nation, has been flinging the institutions of its neighbours about like old kettles, bawling at us, and making the general air ammoniac with feral odours. We have been kept thoroughly worried. We are tired of it. It has caused a flight to America of the more nervous of us. The yells never die down. Each morning we scan the news, trusting to find a first hint that common sense has begun to cool the sweaty frenzies of Nazis and Fascists. It looks as if we have waited for that sign too dangerously long.

*

And that has not been our only trouble. Few of us, while witnessing the mental contortions caused in otherwise good people around us by the Spanish civil war, were able to continue in the belief that decency in the future would have much noticeable effect on European politics. Mussolini's piracies and wholesale murders, Hitler's pulverizing of helpless Guernica by his bombers, and his salvoes from a battleship on sleeping Almeria in revenge, while nobody did more than shake the head regretfully, told us that honour and all the virtues had been flung, in a haste of prudence, into the dust-bins of the world's chancelleries. There was nothing left to trust but luck. We could only pray that this sultry uproar and confusion would blow over. Yet here we are still, this August. It continues. It is a year after Munich. The confusion is worse, and the vociferation of Germany has risen to a sustained pitch which makes common sense inaudible. As we read the news of the day from Pandemonium, at breakfast, the din flattens all dishes to the same taste.



The trouble in 1930, as you know, was a cloud no bigger than a Viennese house-painter's hand. Some of us then drew attention to the little wonder. It was unlovely. It had a very unhealthy and sinister glint. A doubt occurred to a few onlookers then. If the German people allowed cruelties so foul to be done to Germans,

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to their own liberals, democrats, dissidents, folk of Jewish birth, trade-unionists, indeed to any man or woman against whom the Nazis had a grudge, what would they care if the same were done to us? Still, the cloud was but small. But it is not so small this month. The whole east is livid with it. It puts out the morning light. We do nothing but watch that dark uprising. Its shadow falls into the house. Yet despite the preliminary flickering of storm in the fearful portent, we find it hard to admit it means the worst. Will that storm burst? Isn't it a conjuration to frighten us? We are anxious, but not frightened. Reason always rejects the monstrous. Would a ruler who could choose otherwise hazard all civilization for Danzig? That city's revenue is not worth a new grave, and everybody knows it. Besides, the horror of the last war is felt even now, at times, in loneliness; and is felt everywhere, even in Germany. We can see it again, when looking back in solitude, and so acutely that the vision might be but personal, and therefore not to be uttered; for one should not uncover the depth in which faith can be lost: Verdun, the Somme, Vimy and the Salient, our earth as dead as the moon, its youth all sunk in its leaden slough, and the sky sullen over what will never move again. That is a nightmare of the past. Once, it so happened, we looked into the bottomless. We had that monition. Hitler is said to have known it, and he has declared that Danzig

OMENS

is not cause enough for a return to those prospects. Of course it is not. Who could give the word to destroy Europe's treasures and her order of life, merely for a token of prestige ?

*

We still had one genuine reason on which hope of peace could be maintained. There was Russia. Hitler had never dissembled his hatred of the Reds, and he could not set his batteries in motion while Moscow was watching him. We once had people in England, we had very many of them, who tiptoed about with the incurable suspicion that a bearded Russian was hiding in most cupboards of the land. They rejoiced that Hitler was a bulwark against Bolshevism. And their reason ? Hitler had said he was. Now these people, to our amusement, view Russia as Moses did Canaan. Fear has its uses ; it can make us look at facts. Our Conservatives are actually applauding the endeavours of our Government to see eye to eye with Stalin ; but they have forgotten there is a deal of astigmatism to correct before a common view is seen. One day we hear that agreement between Russia and our country is near. We begin to breathe again ; only to learn fairly soon that our differences are inextricably balled into the original tangle.

*

It was but yesterday we heard, incredulously, that Ribbentrop was flying to Moscow. Is this not a proper

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year for chimeras and hippogriffs? We have to believe the impossible is the more likely thing. Ribbentrop going to Moscow! The Nazis and Bolsheviks fraternizing? So today, in a steep and crooked street above a Cornish holiday beach, the men who were crowding round a newsvendor showed less than polite eagerness. They wanted to know what was going on. The children on their way down to the sands pushed past us heedlessly. I feel the morning sun still hot and bright on that corner. It is as if that moment were arrested in time. It stood. We read that the Germans and Russians had a pact, and the ambiguity of a few of its clauses made it seem likely that now we have to face Russia as well as Germany. We happen to know there is a task or two beyond the scope of so powerful a body as the British Commonwealth.

There it is. The Germans are now free to attack the Poles. If they do, then act we must, whatever Russia does, or be for ever damned. There is no return. Our fleet is out, and the French army is in the order of battle. Surely even now Hitler cannot be so confident of the outcome of chaos as to open fire? The world's air is suddenly loud with presidents, premiers, and prelates, beseeching that man of destiny not to pull the trigger.

BLACK-OUT

September 1939

BLACK-OUT

September 1939: One morning, soon after these appeals, I was approaching a familiar village street. The country about me is described in *The Dynasts*. I had not quite given up hope. One finds it hard to surrender all hope of one's fellow-creatures. Though it was early, I saw the gossips at their doors. They looked subdued. Somehow, I felt suspicious. Something had happened. That street was different. A friend came out of the only shop, straight at me, and whispered, "They've started."

They had started. The trigger had been pulled. We both sat on a bench and looked at the ground. Civility had ended. We continued to look at the ground, and said no more. There was no more to say.

Well, suspense was over. Now we knew the worst. All we could do now was to brace ourselves for the shocks. Speculation was useless; besides, you do not feel like judicious political speculation, when bombing planes may be on their way. For that reason, on the instant, we discovered a thirst for material facts, which some people regard as absolute. As good democrats we searched our daily papers for the truth, with a new wariness of propaganda. We were immediately awake to

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what we could not see between the lines. Do you remember the opening chapter of *Hard Times* ?

"Now what I want is Facts. . . . Facts alone are wanted in life. . . . Stick to Facts, sir."

Gradgrind was speaking. Not for a moment did that eminent industrialist pause to consider the nature of facts. He never doubted that he would know what they meant, when he saw them. He was a realist. Gradgrind, busy man, had no time to waste wondering whether a test of intelligence may be the ability to perceive the implications of facts ; yet how surprising, how cruelly deceitful facts can be, though apparently simple and frank ! Who would have suspected that the destruction of civilization was inherent in an invention so attractive, so useful, as the internal combustion engine ?

No. With a plain fact under his nose a realist may not know what he is looking at. Fate, unseen, may be smiling over him at the certainty of his knowledge. Nevertheless, like Gradgrind, in war we demand only facts. Facts, my dear sir ! We want to know exactly where we are. Where are we ? Are we to have the truth ? We are not sure. We doubt it. The censorship is over us. Suspicion will grow, even in a tolerant and judicious onlooker. There comes over him an instinctive inclination to blame somebody for something, he is not sure what. Suspense when in danger acts like that on most people.

BLACK-OUT

We turned from that Dorset village. We had to go back to tell them at home that War had come, and walked slowly. We saw only the stones underfoot. We heard them crunch. Our folk were in the porch, laughing at some nonsense. They heard, were silent, and went apart. That night my friend drove me to London. War was already visible. There were no lights anywhere, even of stars. Our own headlights were smothered with bits of cardboard. We drove at a black wall all the way. Familiar towns and hamlets were denser settlements of night. It was sensational, to push past the black-out of a tavern, and to find sudden expansion and perspective in a bright glare. Out again, the unseen and unknown settled on us. There were no bearings. Once, when we felt we were beginning the ascent of a hill, a red lantern stopped us. We were told to douse everything till we were over the crest. Something was there which had to be kept quite uniform with midnight. London itself was silent. It was trying as well as it could not to be there. London was waiting.



To maintain unity of opinion and purpose in a nation, the black-out has become as essential as air to breathe. True, with better light, and more time, I suppose we might discover what our civilization amounts to, whether it is worth our love and faith, and where in it we are. We need to learn that. We shall never do better, unless

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we see that. As it happens, however, today in Europe, having perfected the electric bulb, a trifling increment to light, we are compelled by a present way of life to smother it with a shade of black glass. These shades are to be bought anywhere, as is bread. Black glass hides most of the light when it is on. Light is unsafe. Need one add to that? Let us think it over. Think of it quite a lot. We could have more light, more than ever before, but fear to use it.



What is wrong with man, when light and knowledge can be dangerous? In some civilized countries learning is conscientiously frustrated. Books are burned, as a State ceremony. All but a censored knowledge is forbidden. In Germany, a statesman has vehemently proclaimed the first revolt against intellectualism since the French Revolution. The mind, he thought, is not only sensitive; it is a dangerous nuisance. In our own land we have been free to range in the news and to think what we pleased. We did not enjoy the news, it must be admitted. For a long time past, for a period which has gravely reduced the three-score years and ten, our dark horizon has been problematical, auguring and muttering. There have been rumours of trouble in the making so preposterous that reason could not always give full attention. Too silly! Crises and conferences. Rumbling of distant gun-wheels. Coming our way?

BLACK-OUT

In the democracies you could get any kind of news you wanted of it all through a choice of newspapers. The inclination, naturally, was to choose the worst; the nearer to idiocy the nearer to truth. Opinion, too, as to what was going on in the world was as free, among democrats, as in Bedlam. You could attend critically to all the home and foreign howling and whooping; no restrictions! If in the midst of the polyglot clamour you kept a bare hope that you yourself were not crazy, not yet, then the corollary faced you that great populations seemed to be not quite all there. For we have seen of late whole nations kept in darkness absolute, and for so long that they have lost desire to grope a way out. Not one of the Greek philosophers, good though they were at peeps into life's secrets, ever discerned that as a possibility in civilization. Innocently bent on increasing light, it never entered the head even of Aristotle that light could be bad for man.

*

So what to do? Nothing whatever. When there is an eclipse of daylight one can but wait. As all the news of the day for years past has had no relation to welfare, its sole purpose being to get on the nerves, we in England have been free to accept it only if we wanted to. We were allowed to laugh at it, if we felt that way, and a few cool people did. Some of us, being peaceable, and in the habit of avoiding excited crowds, and not alto-

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gether unreasonable when the barometer is set fair, were inclined to suppose that this infernal uproar, in which religion, politics and economics were so confused that Deity was indistinguishable from self-interest, meant only that humanity had wandered from its accustomed paths. It was lost. Hard times had driven it from civility to look for short cuts to whatever it wanted, if it knew what it wanted. Perhaps it didn't. The noise would subside. Sanity, though no more than a nostalgic desire for safety, would return to its own presently, not too late.



The black-out is over a continent now. I get lost in my London suburb after dark. Croydon is as unfamiliar, and in certain spots more dangerous, than Sokoto used to be to its first white visitors. Censorship by the State was a hasty and imperfect improvisation at the beginning of the last war. It did better, helped by time and tribulation. It discovered the little chinks which let in light. Its ways were peculiar and unexpected, and its consequences unforeseen. If, one morning, in a French newspaper, there was a large and attractive headline, which was followed by a column and a half of virgin white signed by a famous name, you feared the worst at a glance; doubtless something worse than was in the article. And for my part, I remember that in the beginning one was allowed to mention the fact that a

BLACK-OUT

battlefield could be reproachful with the strewn results of bullets. Later, only German soldiers were slain in battle. Later still, it was decided by the proper authority that a great battle could leave the floor as tidy as would a curate's sewing circle. We may judge then, from these queer signs, that authority does respect the sensibility and intelligence of the public :

Certainly. After all, the mutable many, the hearths and the homes, are of ultimate importance. The multitude should be solicited, entertained, and its tenderness guarded. It has volatile qualities. It is unpredictable. Harm might chill its heart should it learn of war's lesser benefits.

*

Let us admit outright that whatever the virtues may be of our civilization by machinery, a censorship by the State in a time of stress is as inevitable as taxation. There can be no unity in direction without control of news and opinion ; don't argue about it ! Suspense we shall have to suffer. Embattled nations must get at each other in a pitchy midnight. That is one of the curious and ugly consequences of our age of science ; the ranging of the mind must be limited by the police. It is only further evidence that the more our material advantages increase, the faster more irksome and ridiculous life becomes. Personality must go, or at least the best of it. Even warfare is not what it was. Its glory is dirty. When a

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vast confusion is unintelligible in a prolonged and almost impenetrable darkness, it is difficult to add a touch of glory. The prospect is unlovely, but we might have thought that out long before the eclipse was due. It was always very obvious it would be so. We have now come to it, and must acknowledge, whether we want to or not, that in these years it is foolish to expect a government at war to allow anything to be published that does not accord with its strategy. We may only blame it when it publishes lies, and it will not do that unless it fears its own people. Even a democracy at war must have its censorship. We should have known, but were too busy to give the necessary attention, that a parliamentary executive itself is the beginning of collectivism; and industrial society, grown into a huge sprawling organic body with many functions, must respond to the promptings of its capital, or decompose. We may not enjoy the thought of collectivism, but we have it; or it has us, whichever you please. So when a community is at war, censorship is as necessary as uniforms, food-rationing and the conscription of life and property. Individuality disappears, except as a registered number. A nation at war, these days, is totally engaged, and its government must regard the supply of news as it does the output of munitions. Nobody is to blame for this; it arises from the nature of mankind's common desires and activities.



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In the free and easy past, a war-correspondent could lightly embarrass his own generals and admirals. His published opinions only concerned a local affair. Life went its usual round. He did no harm ; perhaps he did some good. All wars, whatever their nature and extent, are efforts to give a reasonable shape and direction to anarchy. It is not easy to give reason and order to anarchy, and a war-correspondent in the old days could be sure of a rich variety of matter to make the folk at home wonder whether the art and science of war were unrelated to gumption. Had silly muddle its part in the romance and glory of armed conflict ? At the least, his details helped to fill the columns of the newspapers, until the morning dawned when the home-folk far away could relish a real battle-piece with the breakfast porridge.



We shall never see the like of that again. Modern war is an industry, largely viewless, for a wholesale and monotonous output of death. These are the years of national wars. The whole of a nation's power, its mines, factories and workshops, its ships and agriculture, all the wealth and energy it directs towards daily bread, are deflected to keep its integrity against an attack by a rival power. A battlefield is now a continent, and even neutral nations must share the catastrophe, like it or lump it. They will be jostled and harassed. This cannot be helped. They must be alert to keep out of the way of propaganda,

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and of explosives wandering in the sea and falling from the sky. And they will not be able to manage it, not all of the time.

So the enterprise and tenacity of factory hands have become as important as the stoutness of a nation's troops. The spirit of the girls at munitions must be equal to that of the men of the war-fleet. But that tenacity and spirit are more vulnerable than the ardour of the fighting forces. To maintain for a long and dreary period a routine against a distant foe is not like soldiering under the stimulation of flying bullets. It is more trying, in the long run, to keep undiminished the speed of wheels in a darkened factory, while unseen bombers are roving about whose blows can be neither parried nor answered, than to look into the eyes of a mortal opponent, equally armed.

Governments have to remember that. Not only factories and harbours are to be guarded, but the springs of natural emotion, a much more kittle business. An inadvertent fact, not at all related to the main issue, dropped without warning into a tender psychological mood, may upset a public more than would drum-fire the troops. The soldiers know within a little what is in front of them, and how to meet what they expect to get; the populace is in the dark, facing what is imponderable, and must trust to words broadcast from many stations, words which often flatly contradict each other. I know

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that in the last war my soul was always easier when under fire than when enduring a spell of war-bulletins at home. Uncertainty corrodes the spirit, and immediate peril rarely does that. In this period of total war, when not even a president or a premier knows the deciding truth of it till that emerges too saliently to need pointing at, a government may publish no more facts than will keep its people in hopeful heart. That nation is the winning nation which can keep going a selection of quickening facts which do certainly arise from the drift of events.

So do not wonder that censors are governed by fear. They never know what an innocent-looking fact may disclose to the wrong eyes. You never can tell what the potency of an allusion may do, and when and where to expect its development. It may not give away artillery positions, but it may suggest to a people, hopefully working and enduring, the shadow of a grim reality which, in the exaltation of its defence, it had overlooked. Truth, in war, can be more terrible than a flight of bombers. For that reason it is war's first casualty. It must be retired with the enemy aliens, and suitably guarded. To complain of this is as idle as to grieve over much else we do not like in a society arising naturally out of principles we have accepted because too lazy to examine. It has been observed that figs do not grow on barbed wire. We forget these little things, till too late.

★

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Facts are not values. This platitude is a fact most readers of the press are apt to ignore. If twenty observers report on a fact, then we shall get an apparent score of facts. A fact is not so important as the man who examines it. It is values that relate facts to each other and to us. Confident Gradgrind, in short, was an ass to suppose he could manage with facts alone. Clearly his facts had but misled him, because he had seen in them only the evidence which accorded with his prejudices, a fact of which he was unaware. The news of the day does not help us much, it may indeed do us harm, unless we can relate its value, that it may go with whatever governs circumstance, like time and the sun. This is not so easy as reading our favourite newspaper.

*

I am aware of the grave potential danger in the censorship, even while acknowledging that in war it is as essential as money and guns. I have lived with censors, and have been forced to note the rum way in which they work their wonders to perform. One of them, once, had to examine, not as an art-critic, about twenty of Orpen's pictures of the battlegrounds of the Western Front. The enemy, of course, could never view those examples of British art, till the war was over. There, to us, the scenes were, as we knew them, but rendered imaginatively. What that censor saw in those pictures is a mystery to me still, but he rejected the lot, and he could not explain

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why, though we asked him. Perhaps he judged it was indelicate to expose stark desolation to innocent eyes. Don't upset the ladies!



Let us confess it, for it can do no further harm, and it is a fact to be commended to Gradgrind and all realists. Never again in the news of war shall we get more than incidental stories that are but distantly related to the tragic drama. More will not be allowed because it cannot be. It would be just as reasonable to expect to see an order of battle on the placards. Nations must battle blindly in darkness till day comes round again, and they can sort out what is left. During the darkness there will be but flashes that may be mistaken for bombast, may be seen as light; it will be hard to tell which. Nothing better is possible.

Yet there is grave danger in the censorship, as unavoidable as peril in downfall. In the last war, German propaganda and war-correspondence for home consumption was brewed as a gross stimulant, and was administered in large doses. Victories were continuous in the direction of ultimate triumph. Mark what happened. A day came when the German public had to be told that its armies, marching to victory, were falling back. Then that public, its courage kept by falsities, collapsed. The stimulative propaganda meant to strengthen its heart was the cause of sudden heart-failure. To give the frustra-

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tion of rational life not only an intelligent but a cheerful countenance is the miracle which a censor is supposed to bring about; still, truth has her victories, no less renowned than war-bulletins.

July 1940

THE CLIFFS OF ENGLAND

July 1940: From the summit of this steep English upland I see only the slow clouds drift, and the conies flicker about. The Channel below is still, is anonymous, a dark floor tilted against the bright vault. It is empty. Not a ship marks it, not a smear of smoke, though it is supposed to be one of the world's busiest highways. This afternoon of high summer there is not a movement anywhere of the business of men. There is only a white fleet of clouds on its course, resplendent and serene, and the occasional lollop of a rabbit. The swoop of a gull down towards the floor gives a sense of precarious height. When a waft of air brushes from seaward over the headland, the sea-thrift nods many drowsy heads, and a warm smell of thyme moves past. We are waiting.

*

The earthworks and barrows of a folk long gone are about me. They have been gone thirty centuries.

THE CLIFFS OF ENGLAND

Yesterday a young friend found a token of them, brought to daylight again by a burrowing fox; a flint arrow-head. The man who lost it lived here about the year when Abraham journeyed south to Egypt. For this English promontory has witnessed much. Upon it, one night, a night a long way this side of Genesis, a beacon flared, when at last the Armada of Spain was in sight. Not long after that, a ship called the *Mayflower* was insignificant in the distance, bound for what no watcher on this height could say. And when Napoleon's army of invasion was over the way ready for a chance to cross and march on London, from here another ship was watched, and today we can better imagine with what emotion; the *Victory*, fading west and south, on her way to Trafalgar.



The horizon is sharp and perfect, and the sea is bare. That news may seem trifling and not worth recording, for no one would expect the weather and the waters about the familiar foreland to be other than natural; to be as they were yesterday, and when the Armada was passing, and when the men of the stone weapons whispered of the coming of strangers with copper. Yet wind and weather and the horizon have acquired an aberrant significance. From out there comes a threat that the ancient ways of life of the rough islanders are to be ended. The English are told they

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have lived too long as they pleased. This historic fore-land is condemned. It is to be given to its foxes and hawks. Beyond the horizon is hate. So we must keep watch upon it once again in the way of our forefathers. We prefer that our land should not return to briars, furze and vermin.



An American friend, concerned for my welfare, in a recent letter hoped that I had "gone inland." We have no inland. The challenge allows none. Wherever we are, wherever we go, what we wait for can be over us, as well as around the beaches where the children were at play last summer. Even now it is not easy for us to make out the full meaning of the menace, for proper neighbours have been opposite our coasts for so long, Scandinavians, Danes, Hollanders, Belgians and the French. Calamity at hand has an element of mystery when it is sudden novel and encompassing. It is not easy to believe a threat of extinction. But the map assures us the enemy is northward of the Shetlands, is actually in the Arctic; and comes south by Holland to the narrow seas and the French coast. What, to France? Yes, and it is hard to explain what that means to us. We still ponder that fact in wonder, and with incredulity. For many long and easy years we have looked to the French cliffs as to the porch of another home, and a welcome; but now the enemy is there. Over the

THE CLIFFS OF ENGLAND

narrow seas our gay and hospitable neighbours have been scattered and dispossessed by the annihilators. Like many other ancient and settled communities of a continent, they have been turned into nomads. Beyond Ushant, then, goes the darkness, and south to Spain. Any further? Possibly. We have discovered it safer to prepare for the unthinkable worst.

*

What faces us today transcends international war. It is new in history; anyhow, new since the forgotten Tatar invasions. It goes beyond contention over sovereignty, and over ancient rights to tribute. From the beginning of this war its inherency was guessed, and in this hour it is stark. There can be no compromise with our adversary; implacable evil has no good in it to which reason can appeal. Our enemy speaks a language civility does not know and cannot learn. Some years ago a German leader announced that his country was making the first revolt against free intelligence since the French Revolution, and we laughed. We are not laughing now. Those anarchists, using the discoveries of science not for the aid of men but for havoc, are deriding reason and abolishing law. How compromise with that? The heritage of the Renaissance and the Reformation—the foundation of Christendom, if you like—will be either kept on the British coast or will perish in Europe. There is something horrifying in the way

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establishments, ancient because men long since proved their worth and necessity, vanish overnight. One looks to a landmark in another dawn; it was there yesterday, but it is gone. Our accustomed bearings, even the Golden Rule, are no longer valid. It is all as in that dismaying dream when one sees the immutable stars stream down the sky. Which one of us, last month, would have suggested that before June was out Frenchmen would have thrown away the tradition of 1789, their treasures and possessions, their heritage from Athens and Rome, and assigned their country's arms to their enemy, for the destruction of their friends? That would have been the suggestion of malignity, or of an imbecile; yet one morning we woke to see it was so. Our neighbour's friendly house of yesterday had become an arsenal of the wreckers. We are beset. We have no inland. All we civilians have are shelters known as Andersons. If American well-wishers would learn what these are, they had better not come over to find out, for our refuges are in daily use. We not only wait for it, but in the meantime we get some of it.

*

Something happened then. The atmosphere was displaced. The rock at my back was jarred. My companion, who found the arrowhead, is kneeling alert. The guns! We see neither smoke nor target. Then he points to what, over the sea, at a blinding height, appears

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to be a scurry of dots, as of rooks at remote and leisurely evolutions. We hear the rapid and intermittent fluttering of machine-guns. Raiders are up there, and our men are among them; but all dissolve in the radiance, and the clouds move on. A white mushroom grows instantly on the sea-floor, and dissolves. The strangest thing in war, as in all human woe, is that earth and sky remain aloof, uninformative, unaffected. They make no sign that they are with us, or against us. The sea-thrift nods its heads drowsily, as in peace, and that gull is poised, and then sheers obliquely. We see and hear no more. We wait for the next thing. In what shape will it come, and when, and where?

We scramble down the foreland among outcropping hummocks of limestone. Below, in a wooded valley, the sea out of sight, the only signs are of immemorial tranquillity. This place once waited the coming of Napoleon, a bogey still surviving locally in nursery rhymes; there is even a legend that the great man landed near here one night, and was seen and recognized. But now, across a mead, a girl is getting the cows home, and a husbandman is hoeing among his mangolds. Yet there, in a hedge, added to the tangle of honeysuckle and bryony, is a vine more determinate, its roots in the hidden hut of a signaller, and it runs on straight with whatever it has to tell. No flaming beacons now. Our own presence on the foreland was known, we learn, for

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a young sergeant in battle-dress stops us, and wants to know what we saw up there. He wears a decoration, but is too young to have won it at Ypres or on the Somme. He is perfunctory about it. "Dunkirk," he says. But he does venture a little of what was done by his small body of British volunteer infantry, really in their last ditch, to a mob of young Germans who continually chanted "Hitler," as if tranced, but did not use their weapons, and his story was discordant with an ancient prospect which seemed not to have heard of war. "Mind you, sir," this young man corrected, "it's one thing to fight in a foreign country, when you don't know what's going on. But this is different. If they come here, we'll show you."



German youth, chanting Hitler, as in a trance! There it is, the new mysticism, which intelligence cannot reach, and as ferocious with whatever drives it on as was the original host of Tamerlane. That is the inexplicable dread in this war, which the explosions and mutilations of other wars never evoked. The battle is more than encounters between ships, airplanes, artillery and tanks. The tactics and strategy of the text-books may position it provisionally, but they cannot end it. Out of the viewless comes a corruption of the instinctive loyalties of men. Before the guns have the range of their bodies, they are changed, and a country may be lost before

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the tanks have crossed the frontier. The old values, patriotism, philanthropy, religion, kinship, which we thought as enduring as the hills, we have discovered can disappear in a night, as though all we had ever innocently trusted was spectral. That is the reason why to many people the war is still questionable ; or a "phoney" war, as was said. They do not yet understand that the German revolution is against all those traditional sanctities acknowledged by fellowship, and without which hitherto we could not imagine communal life. How combat that ? With what ? It needs the faith of the Early Fathers to meet it ; and when last were we Christian men ? This new revolution contaminates the source of motives. Honour, in its language, can mean the same as treachery, and in its thought an altar is as any gaming table. It effects a change in the soul ; instead of the old-fashioned salvation, is damnation. For this new revolutionary ardour is not for liberty, equality and fraternity, but appeals to the innate baseness of men, usually controlled by the laws and conventions of decent folk. By it the bully acquires the opportunity, and therefore the right and the pleasure, to destroy the institutions within which hated superiority once kept him in order.

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Intercourse is perverted when words may have any value stratagem chooses to give them ; and we have discovered that intercourse with our neighbours has long

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been polluted. For that reason, we have but one certainty today, apart from a multitude of simple and dutiful men such as that young sergeant. Looking backward to the November in which the last war ended, we see it never ended. Since then we have been living hopefully in a confusion of lies and moonshine. No conjecture we made about the world's affairs, on whatever fair word we heard or read, promising the dawn of common sense, in all those years, was anything but a deluding cheat. Evil, though naturally we did not want to believe it, was in the ascendant. Not the will to good, but alienating egotism and cruelty were dominant, and moving with the craft and energy more usual in subversion than creation. Our planet on its journey to the unknown might have been passing through the poisonous dust of a dead star. What, then, may we depend on today? Only on the faith we can muster in personal resolution for another and a better beginning, if we can win through to that bare ground of promise.

*

I should say that, through most of the hours of May and June of 1940, we suffered the blows of a long and full life. Our earth reeled under foot. Any faint hope for better tidings on the morrow was mocked. Would our standing ever again be firm? We did not know. We thought not. The ancient establishments

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and acceptances were collapsing. We listened to official news at midnight, and remained awake with those dreadful facts next to the pillow; and in the morning, somehow, we had to muster courage to attend to the first broadcast. We did not want to hear it, but we had to. It would be there, anyhow.

*

Yet how lovely was the early summer in England! There never was a more vivid burgeoning. Now and then, in a deliberate effort to still the mind, one paused, and was surprised. There it was, the goodness of the earth. One could hardly believe it. What, still with us, the comeliness of life? Not in mourning for us? There it stood, as though full summer appeared in an instant, because the mind was quiet. Yet it seemed to be a mockery, like all else. Cherry and apple blossom, hawthorn, lilac and laburnum. No finality there; it was the uprising. One had to turn away. That loveliness was but phantom. It was in the garden we knew, but it was not ours. It belonged to a settled world, which had gone. We were in another dimension, conjured into it diabolically, where all was in movement to an incomprehensible issue, nothing there to be proved, time itself turned enemy, the stars falling, and no new shape, hopeful at first sight, that did not deride us as we watched, smoke in the wind. All was lies, except evil. Evil was true. It was curious, after listening at the radio to more

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news and worse, in those two months, to look round vaguely, only to see that the objects in one's own room were as usual. They were unaffected, so far. Had they not heard :

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The meaning of those laconic messages from France needed courage to confess aloud and outright. That was so especially to a listener who well knew the places named in the news, because he was in the other war. For years those place-names had had associations which gave them, to some men, the sound of an incantation. It was useless to talk about them, for they meant more than could be said. Away they were going now, out of sight, dead litter in the storm. They meant nothing whatever. To see them vanish thus, of no meaning in the overwhelming by a new reality, was like watching one's own identity torn away and disappear. One day, without a prelude, we were advised coolly by an impersonal voice that Arras and Amiens were occupied by the enemy. Then was reality monstrous : Amiens in flames ? That cathedral ?

The news ended. A man in the room, who is near to us, rose. He is a man of peace, called a pacifist, by the careless. "They are getting behind our fellows," he muttered, and left us. He returned in uniform, to say farewell.

*

A few evenings later, after the Belgians had uncovered

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our army's left flank, we sat round and listened, unable to look each other in the face, while Winston Churchill told us, "Fighting is going on in and around Boulogne. There is no need to explain what that means."

No. No need at all. We did not move nor speak. Was the end coming? Coming so soon? A girl in the room, to be married the next week, broke silence when nobody else there knew how to do it. "Can our army be saved?" she asked quietly. And one who was present, who knew that only Calais and Dunkirk remained, if they did remain, and at the best what those ports were like, was forced to answer her. "I don't see how it is possible." Nobody thought it was possible, that night—it was a terrible night—nor the next day, because it was an evident impossibility. We were within an hour of disaster. Wedding feasts, too, had lost their meaning.



We began to breathe freely again, I fancy, on the evening when we heard we stood alone; on the night when we had to confess, "because there is none other that fighteth for us but only thou, O God." Confidence returned. A neighbour peered over his wall next morning and remarked to me, "Now we know where we are." I myself was not quite sure of that. We had the French fleet swerving its guns round on us, and one was aware that no provision against miraculous adversity

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is ever to be found in war preparations ; but I understood my neighbour. Now we had nobody but ourselves to lose, and in that matter we possessed some good information. It was amusing, when midnight was at a standstill, and as black as the bottomless, to know that the people around were beginning to find themselves, were bracing up ; to hear subdued grim laughter. The spirit lightened, and anxiety began to go. There were even bolder ones. They manifested exhilaration ; the honour of this task was solely for us. I envied them their heart, while misdoubting their knowledge and prescience. Still, when the outlook is worse than dark, when the sky is like the prelude to downfall and eclipse, then for youth to cheer what confronts it may be as good an intimation as any other of immortality.

*

It was clear they must fight for their lives. For their lives ? That had become a lesser matter, past considering. It was for the treasure of life they must stand up, not for themselves. If the right to use the mind were to be lost, as over most of Europe it was already lost, what apology would be left to mankind for its occupation of the earth ? There would be none. The light would be out. Our earth would revert to old night without its initial spark of hope. With reason no longer attempting the guidance of the affairs of men, who instead would be driven by the engines of power and pride, then death

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already had come; the adventure of mind under the stars would be at an end. The war, then, for us, is something more than an effort to protect the home and personal interests. An abominable dominion has to be overcome, its purpose to obliterate from human society the virtue which has raised us above the caves and bones.

I do not think we saw this—or perhaps were reluctant to admit it—till the day when Rotterdam was destroyed. That removed what doubt was left; nor was it only the fear that London might suffer a like fate which wakened us. The blasting down into rubble and carrion of a city at peace, its people unsuspecting, unable to defend itself when the destroyers appeared overhead to begin their leisurely work of making a famous community illegible, and for no purpose than to bring about elsewhere panic out of horror, it was that which shocked us into sighting the nature of the threat to the settlements of good manners. The man who ordered the rendering of Rotterdam from life into a stench, a city of silence but for the buzzing of flies, and so soon after assuring it of his good intent, was as foreign to reason as the origin of plague. That was what we had to recognize.



So no more content in the hours of the day. No more a book in solitude by candlelight at midnight. No more a garden of one's own. Even day-dreams, in which the future is occasionally shaped, are broken when the siren

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directs us to seek cover. Ah! that future! Families are scattered and homes abandoned. We may not enter them any more. The accustomed work of a man is lost to him, and may not again be wanted of him. What are art, literature and science, when regions, with all their towns, must be abandoned to sandbags, barbed wire and guns? The temple is shut. Our ways of life would have been disrupted less by a general earthquake; we must manage in catastrophe with chance adaptations. Yet how resilient is common human life! Their work done, villagers leave home of an evening, with what weapons they can get, to patrol their fields and hills. At dusk one meets them sauntering off, with rifles and shot-guns, not knowing what may drop from the sky while their families sleep.

*

When first citizens are surprised in their market-place, or a civic centre, by a mass of brown sandbags, guns pointing from its loopholes, with barricades of wire around, it takes a minute of puzzled staring to place this sign of immediate war among the accustomed sights. Then the addition is accepted and no more is thought about it. Though women are in jeopardy they must do their shopping. "This way to the Trenches." They note the day's new fact, and enter the stores. Life must go on. Despite all intellectual doubts, and the sad fallibility of news, and even of assurances solemnly sworn

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to; and despite the dismaying certainty that our enemy is such that he overwhelmed the formidable army of France in twelve days, we have found that we must continue to live by faith. Faith in this and that is all that is left to us. We must trust the invisible. We still believe that there were no better soldiers in Europe than the French. Then how befell their tragedy? Faith had left them, and they were unarmed. For us there was Dunkirk. Though the "encirclement with fire and steel" of our army was announced, what could not be done was accomplished. Dunkirk, as a sort of miracle, stayed us.



We see our troops, for they live around us, but very little of our seamen and airmen, and then usually at railway stations. Occasionally they show, but only distantly. I look seaward to the weather at dawn—for another day has come, and we are still here—and glimpse one good reason why our night was undisturbed. On the skyline, between the headlands, the far shapes of the naval patrol show black in the pallor. But we rarely sight our ships; our faith is that they are always out there. We don't know what they are doing, for when they appear distance gives them a casual and melting presence; but occasionally window curtains bulge, as the air is displaced by gunfire, when the haze veils a convoy of merchant ships, and the navy has put its arm round them. And

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yesterday afternoon was stormy, with breakers plunging over the rocks. It was not the day for invasion, and so I was not thinking of war, but noted, with satisfaction, that the seas were heavier than an hour before. We have reason to love the sea more than ever. Nor was it a day for men to be flying; the ceiling was too low and dark for that, and only the flashing of the combers showed where the ocean was below it. Then an object suddenly appeared, skimming just above the smother of black and white, like a sea-bird easy in the tumult. One of our Spitfires! What madness, to be at play in and out of the spume! I watched him, in wonder and alarm, while he circled round, and then mounted to disappear in the scud. An hour later I learned that he had, but the moment when I saw him first, sent an enemy into the waves, and was searching for any survivor to report.



Faith, we know, is but knowledge surpassed. Well, we have some knowledge on which to support our faith. Enough has happened at sea to tell us that what Cochrane used to do with ships can still be done by our seamen. It is as if our mariners have never lost the abrupt disconcerting wit of youth. Perhaps freedom, salt and sunlight are preservative. We have also learned that the kind of men who, long ago, harried the Spaniards up-Channel, have taken their lively devices to the clouds, and spend day and night cruising the sky between our

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land and Germany. Democracy is not old and worn. Never believe it. It is still in its early and experimental stage. In such an adventure as this it shows its juvenile adaptability, sprightliness and temerity.

*

Some of my friends may be surprised that I write thus of war. I still think war an obscene outrage on the intelligence. I should not be in the least upset by what Communists call the downfall of British Imperialism. I see no reason to alter a line of what I wrote of war and peace in *Mars His Idiot*. We may have various views of capitalism, the materialistic conception of history, religion, of the ways to distribute the vast wealth released by the contrivances of science, and of the problem of liberty when the State has taken over the business of Jehovah. It is evident that we have hardly begun yet to plan a way of living together in freedom, amity and equality, though our control and use of natural forces have resulted in reducing our globe to so delicately balanced a foothold in the heavens for everybody that a disturbance in China rocks the lot of us dangerously. But this challenge by the Nazis is ultimate. If they have their way then nothing can be discussed. There will be no right or wrong, neither good nor evil; even the priest at the altar may be one of the secret police. Slavery is bearable, but the mind in chains is not. I know that some of our traditions and institutions may

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perish in resisting this subversion of the mind, but all will surely perish if no resistance is made. That is the choice we have.

*

I do not see anything unreasonable, therefore, in the substitution on the shore below of endless coils of barbed wire for the children who were there last year. It looks odd, with nobody in sight where the fun used to be, but there is no help for it. Should invaders ever reach that slope, to toil up it, wet and heavy, and wet they will be, by the time they are tiring at the wire there will be a very horrible great blast of fire from all the tussocks of grass above. I should call very good the disposition of the strong points I have hit upon, by chance. They at least assure me that it would be more comfortable for a man to be hidden on the shore than to be exposed yonder in a crowded flat-bottomed boat; though how that boat or whatever it is to be will reach this point I cannot quite make out. Hitler, maybe, with his lore of the sea, knows more and better than some of us, so we must even wait to discover what his maritime secret is.

*

We are waiting. Back in a London suburb, after black-out time, with the night sky still retaining a bright memory of day, I see my own place in an aspect that is like excommunication. It is recognized, but it

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is changed. The street lights are so subdued and screened that one becomes melancholy, as if revisiting, in another life, the glimpses in an everlasting twilight of things past. Were our chimneys and tree-tops always outlined like that against the upper light, when we were on earth? Then we never knew it. These objects are tranquil, as if they, too, were waiting; or perhaps they are simulacra only, not really there; nothing now to do with us. There is no air. But in this new existence perhaps the air never moves. These shades might be tranquil, or might be sinister. Nobody else is there to tell me. Perhaps I shall meet another lost soul in the twilight presently, with later news than mine. Only the stars are familiar, and I stand to reassure myself with the enduring figures of the old constellations. Odd! What is the name of that bright star? Once I knew it. I knew it as well as my own name, but it is forgotten. What can have happened to the memory, when even the names of the stars are erased from it? What have I lost? The very names of things have gone.

*

Long after midnight, because sleep will not come, I look again at the sky. One must watch for signs and wonders. The heavens are now cross-hatched with the bright beams of searchlights. They sweep over, interlace, concentrate on a lenticle of cloud, move away abruptly. It is as if desperate day had come only in

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narrow nervous sections, and were trying to unify into morning, but was frustrated by an immovable mass of night. When will morning come?

August 1940

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August 1940: It was near midnight, no moon, and the sky overcast. The air was brooding. The slow surge of the tide making around the rocks below could be heard deeply, in diapason, a sound as if the universal were in soliloquy. We had come to it. Here was the hour, the dark, the calm, the tide, the right conjunction in circumstance for the invasion of England. The experts had told us to expect it. But though you may have found out what experts are, and too often to be misled by them, yet one did feel this night that fate need not have been quite so theatrical, for things were bad enough. If we were doomed, then let fate get on with it!

*

The darkness was absolute. In what shape would the enemy come? You should be in England now, anywhere here would do, to learn what darkness is when a power lies in wait against you that has a form unknown. The soldier walking beside me paused. His face glowed as he lit his pipe. "I wish," he said bitterly, before we

resumed our patrol, "that fellow in Germany would come out. Let us get at him, and get it over."

We had not spoken for some time, but he had uttered my own thought. It is a common thought. It comes to all of us. Idle words are sure to fly up out of smouldering anger, impatience and anxiety. It was black and heavy, our summer world, and its stillness was not only delusive but ugly. This quiet would be burst open. Where would the clangour begin? Then, while we stood considering this, there being no hurry about it that we could see—we could not so much as see each other—we heard low voices. We could not place the speakers, who were serious and subdued. We eavesdropped. The words we heard were of probabilities, guesses prompted by the news in a late and scant broadcast, which we had missed. The only certainty was that heavy attacks by air had been made on our country that day.

So it had begun? We bent our ears for more, but no more came. The murmuring ceased. We tried to find the speakers, but nobody was about. Only a sea-mew cried from mid-air, very like a short derisive laugh, small and idiotic.



The day had come? London attacked at last? That invincible might of the German fleet in the air, which had so frightened Europe, it had struck home? We could not tell, and it was useless to attempt to telephone. The

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telephone is off, in war, in the very hour when you would give a full purse to hear a known and trusted voice. Patience now is not only a virtue but compulsory. We must wait for morning. Those broadcasts! So often they excite but cannot satisfy. Still, was that air-invasion beaten off? We wanted to know; we dared to hope so. Yet is it easy to stop an incursion of numberless locusts?

The night remained silent about it. There was nothing to do but turn in. The ticks of the clock could be counted. If sleep were refused, then stare at the place where the window ought to be, like a gymnosophist, till it shaped in another morning. There was enough, meanwhile, to keep one's thoughts going. This war is of so entirely new an order that you can be as speculative about it as an ant when its hill has been turned upside down. Civilization has progressed so far that it will have to begin again, though how and with what we don't know; not yet. New powers are at large which have made the lessons of the last war and its following peace, political, military, economic and moral, as obsolete as medieval arms, feudal society and chivalry. Even today's children must dimly surmise that a new life has begun for them, young though they are, as they pause before their rural schoolhouse, to wonder why the legs of a German airman are dangling over its parapet. Front lines are with Agincourt. While still thinking the trouble is nowhere near you, explosions begin in

that place, without a prelude. Down you must go into a ditch, or flat on the pavement, resting your head on an arm, and keeping the mouth a little open. The front line runs across every roof. The cradle, the free library and the cinema are outposts.

*

Well, had the fabulous power which reduced Rotterdam to rubble and bones now made London desolate? While waiting to hear about that there was an encouraging fact to keep me company. It was the only one I had, but in the long run it might prove to be the cardinal fact. In more than one way, Dunkirk was a revelation. Out-numbered there, our men in the sky lightly maintained the tradition of those seafarers who, once on a time, with a smaller fleet of better ships, mishandled in confident abandon the maritime tradition of great Spain. Do not think that parallel from 1588 was a solace far-fetched, when sleep would not come. There are virtues of the unpredictable human spirit, as well as vices, which will never become obsolete, in any new era. And when condemning a democratic people for senility and slowness, remember also that many of them will be young, vivacious, honest and simple souls, undisturbed by a legend of a terrible bogey. They will not have given much attention to it. Then again, it is the high pleasure in sport for an outside team to laugh to itself while it takes its chance at walloping the proud favourite

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in the last match. So I could, that anxious night, while waiting for what I should hear at daylight, recall the name of John Hawkins, and with satisfying relevance to the present tribulation of my people.

*

That Devonian, in consultation with his friend Drake and other cronies who had been to sea, aware of what the English might sight some day in the offing, boldly discarded the ancient notion of a fighting ship, which was a castle afloat for soldiers; and his act scared the traditionalists. But Hawkins had noticed that sailors, not soldiers, were the fellows to time gunfire when seas were running. He wanted nimble ships with striking power, and he built them, aware that he had the men to work them. Magnitude did not intimidate him. Now, our history books tell us that "He blew with his winds and they were scattered." I agree, and without the aid of mysticism. But I suspect that the impulse to that phrase came of Queen Elizabeth's diplomatic art when issuing her medal for the victory. She remembered she was a heretic, and excommunicate, and so found pleasure in pointing to the probability that God, as the world could now observe, seemed to have been on her side, after all. For the truth is, the Spaniards in that far-off July had a fair wind all up the Channel. It carried them along to their task, which was to protect Parma's army on its way over to England. But while on their course

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to do this, favoured with a proper wind, they were outsailed and outgunned. The prestige and august might of Spain were of no avail. This incomprehensible novelty bewildered the Spaniards, and shook their nerve. That was why, while anchored in Calais Roads one night, panic seized them when fire-ships came. The scattering began. Next day, off Gravelines, they were hammered till they turned away, and the wind did begin to blow which broke them up, that foul wind which set crippled galleons inshore, and drove them to run for home, if they could make it, by the north about. Parma's army was left standing on the sand-dunes. Thus, by the look of it, we see that a wind of God, but long before the event, may blow into a receptive mind a creative thought destined to bias the event. Hawkins seems to have been so favoured, and to have believed what came to his mind with all his heart. The wind which to indifferent weathercocks appears to blow where it listeth, perchance quickens with creative notions the minds and hearts of the just, if they have the will to believe . . . and that was an omen for August 1940. Our men in the sky, we had seen, had a confidence in their craft which sent them lightly against the dreaded German air-force, to shoot it down, two and three to one.

*

Some of these men we know, and what we know of them makes still more mysterious their performances

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aloft. Down on the earth, at table, or idle while off duty, they perplex us. We look for signs of their singular aptitude, as one might ponder Ariel, but nothing shows except the poise of ownership, shyness and good humour. I notice, when with them, that the subject of flying should be avoided. Talk of anything but that. I can but guess that when they are above the clouds, and out of sight, they are transfigured. They have a secret. I should like to watch them up there, but have no wings. It is impossible for mortals to approach the horns of the moon. These men leave us. Later, while people sleep, there falls from the clear firmament a dreadful music, though nothing can be seen above except the immortal constellations, and one might suppose that at last was heard the very quiring of the stars on their way to what we shall never know. To that companionship with Orion our young friends, who had breakfast with us, are translated. They have gone hunting. Their unearthly music falls to us from space, from between Ursa Major and Perseus. They are changed into the Dawn Patrol.



One of these pilots, a youngster of our acquaintance, after France had surrendered, was worried because fifteen messmates had been left in a Biscayan port. He went to his superior at his aerodrome in central England. "Let's get them out of it, sir."

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Out of it? What was he talking about! The enemy was there by then; nothing could be done.

Something must be done, protested the junior, and explained what he would do. His superior then also went mad. He dropped discretion and superiority, and allowed "a big old bus" to be emptied of everything. Even its machine-guns were removed. Both set out into the blue. "What will you do if we meet the Jerries?" asked the senior, while over the sea, for they had no arms. "Dive on the beggars," said the pilot. But they had a clear run. They found their men, who, so the narrator told us, were as cheerful as if victory were at hand. "I think," said their senior, looking at his watch, while merry-making proceeded, "we ought to be going." This the boys could not dispute, as they saw the Germans were beginning to arrive. "Then," explained our informant, "we packed in the whole fifteen with a shoe-horn, and got 'em home to lunch. They were hungry. . . . No. Nothing happened."

*

The news of the battle in the air, when we heard it early next morning, was as terse as the report from a flat market. Its geography was cryptic, and less easily solved than a cross-word puzzle. London, however, was not involved. That cool and laconic relation broadcast, and addressed before breakfast to an acute and popular interest, was nothing like the story we used to

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get of the final struggle for the English Football Cup, in the happy days of long ago. The chief stay in it was that our Hurricanes and Spitfires were as right as ever, news as good as the word that we could continue to live on, for the time being, and look up. I can see now that our authorities were harshly careful because they knew no more than the rest of us what was in the wind, and still to come. There had been so many surprises in this war to shock us into silence that there might be others. No applause, please !



Were we wrong, then, in assuming that the invasion had begun ? It looked like it. Still, instinct as well as circumstance warned us that Hitler, somehow, though we knew not how, must drive to a conclusion ; and reason said that he had begun his drive. We were aware that it would give him rapture to do to London what he did to Warsaw, if he could. No doubt of that. Those Nazis always had a rankling hatred of us more poisonous than anything they felt for the French ; and a reminder that English Liberals, from the end of the last war, had been Germany's only rational friends in Europe, was enough to jump them into loud and dancing hysteria. Something else came to me. I remembered that it was on August 8, this year, that a surprise attack was made on Dover and the shipping in the Channel by remarkable clouds of planes. That was ominous. The Germans

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are superstitious over dates. We have noted that. Hitler, whenever he consults his astrologist, would have brooded over August 8, for it was Germany's Black Day, so named by Ludendorff. On that day, in 1918, in an attack by Canadians, Australians and Londoners before Amiens, the German army began to topple, and thereafter continued to go over till November, from the North Sea to the Alps. Hitler, of course, would blame us for that. It was the day fixed by the stars for the return compliment, to compensate gloriously one more of those abundant German humiliations. Irrational? Yes, but the militarist and the gambler are more superstitious than a black African in his banana patch. War is irrational; it is chance in anarchy.

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That attack on Dover and the ships by dive bombers had an end so cheering that Londoners soon forgot it. It was a danger past. It was without special significance. That brings us to the point when it ought to be admitted that whether Britons are confident, or only thick-headed, is a doubt which halts some of us, nervously aware that old habits of thought, the result of long immunity from invasion, do not allow us to view our peril with the requisite concern, in this new era for everybody. We do know, having his own word for it, that it is Hitler's will, irrevocable as ever, to blot us out; but the odd fact is that though we have witnessed in horror his

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methods when blotting out other people, it is rare to meet a man or woman at home who has anything more than a puzzled look, or a smile, for the threat of the abolition of our own ancient establishment. What, push over those hills? How blot us? Mop up the sea? Naturally it is difficult for a Briton, if his home is where the funnels of ships are as commonplace as chimney-pots, to believe that a great army fully furnished can be shipped overseas and landed as easily as tanks cross a frontier; the sea is wet, and that doubter perhaps knows a little of the mystery of stevedoring. He wonders how stevedoring would be managed under gunfire. He thinks such a problem must puzzle even Hitler.

*

Then he hesitates. He reflects anew. Has he overlooked an important quantity in his reckoning? Is there a deciding factor of which he has never heard? He remembers the many incredible events that have been to Hitler's advantage, since the war began, triumphs won so cheaply, to all appearance, that they might have come of art magic. There is excuse enough for doubt, when one frowns into the future, trying to discern what is there, and seeing little, even when helped by an understanding of everything implied by ships and the sea; excuse enough, while one gazes round the horizon of another morning—undefiled, so far—and with all one knows of war and peace quite unable to judge where

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next the infernal plague will break out. This new era ! It is in that moment of pause and doubt, while feeling the impartial geniality of the sun, smelling wood-smoke (autumn is near), noticing absently the sprightliness of the swallows, so strangely unconcerned, and the stillness and aloofness of the elms, and hearing the voices of children at play, that a hate of the Nazis falls over the mind like the sudden chill of a cloud across the sun ; a shadow one would put off, if one could, but cannot. Those men, fouling life, driving dirt into thought, rendering even the morning light unreal ! Because of them, the very laughter of innocence at play is dismaying, for tonight it may be blotted out. For what ? . Hitler's horoscope ! This hate of the obscene, hardly felt in the last war, I can affirm, must be reckoned with. I spoke today to a young soldier, a simple man, who was in the retreat to the sea. His own part in it did not seem to interest him, but he did recall, low-voiced, some wayside scenes in a deliberate hunting down of homeless civilians by German planes, which flew low, playful with machine-guns on helpless crowds. A Belgian child by the roadside stirred among the dead, and this youth went to help, and raised her. Her arm fell off. He does not fear invasion. He wants it to come. I left him cleaning his rifle by a beach.

*

He is wrong ? Yes, I suppose he is ; and so am I.

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Hate is wrong. But that child's arm fell off. She opened her eyes to see who touched her and then died. So what can we do? Tell me that. Is innocence to perish because of one man's destiny? Is its laughter to be silenced for that? Shall we allow an insensate fool to put out the light, and thereafter sit in darkness? If hate, though of what is foul, is unlovely, yet the prospect of continuous darkness, unrelieved by a gleam of reason, in which cruelty is absolute, seems a deal worse. I cannot justify hate, but would say merely that we hate a prospect in which life loses all the values for which we care. Not even that legendary star, by the light of which men built their great cathedrals, the star they still celebrate with music appropriate to the aisles of Chartres and Canterbury, will show a ray in the darkness that threatens us. We need not be Christian men to hate the imminence of purgatory without hope.



That is why, when recently a relative wrote to tell me, in wry words, that he practised with his bayonet on dummies erected in the cloisters of abbey ruins where monks once illuminated missals and early texts of our faith and origin, I found I could not disagree with him about it. He said that, except with machinery, we have got nowhere worth mentioning in ten centuries. The irony of it, he felt, ought to be sharpened later against whoever and whatever are blameworthy, and he desired

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to live for that. Just now, though, he admitted, we had no time for backward glances in appraisal; our enemy is on the encircling horizon, and we have no room to spare. The golf-course is a land mine, the public park is cultivated into a surprise for visitors we do not want, and the bathing-beach is altered to scarify an ichthyosaurus, should it try to land. No church bells may ring.

*

My friend's letter came on the morning of the day when Hitler had his first great defeat of the war. Even as I read it, the man who wrote it was busy with his team shooting down six German bombers. For me, the hour was unsullied. There was nothing overhead but idle gulls. I thrust the letter into a pocket while inspecting three fine trout a gunner had caught in the stream beside his post. A few minutes later a young matron asked me whether I had heard the screaming bomb fall in the night. What, there? No. Had she? Had she not! I was still inclined to reject that bomb, but she described the beast. It alighted three fields behind the children's bedroom, after its vile song, but they slept on, and she was thankful for that, while she watched a hayrick burning. She fancied at first the old church tower was alight, it seemed to be red-hot, but that was only the reflection, she found. How silly the Germans were, dropping bombs there!

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This was puzzling. I was travelling far that day, to places where bombs were more probable. Jerry must be up to something, to have included so unlikely a spot in his battle orders. And what a grand feature he makes of terror! Even his bombs must scream before they burst.

I had to go, and at once forgot one odd and irresponsible bomb. My train at length neared a seaport old in story. I must not name it; though it would vastly improve the omen of this yarn if I could. The train remained at a platform long enough for an appreciation of the scene without, which included one admiral, several captains, a number of other naval officers, mingling with bluejackets and marines—mostly British, but some French—in a manner more casual and on the level than I remember of the other war. The nonchalant French seamen appeared to be well-salted. The admiral was wearing an old raincoat, though it was a warm day, to hide his high office. Pay no attention to me! A matured commander stood near my window, giving affable advice to a junior French naval officer, and that figure of his was one for a civilian to remember, when trusting that our invisible ships are keeping their eyes open. I relished the head and bearing of that mariner, in such a place as that, while my train waited there. . . .



We passengers gazed sharply at each other round our

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compartment. Our eyes asked the question. What was that? Wasn't it the wailing note?

It was. It continued to wail. The people in the station, I noticed, did not run. Their interest was in the sky. Women remained just where the warning found them, with their children and parcels. Why lose your train because of an unpleasant noise?

Our guard appeared. He told us we could go on, if we wanted to, or get out. There was a raid on.

Nobody got out. The train resumed its journey, and as it was rounding a curve we had a broad view of a battle in modern war. What we saw was an array of impassive balloons, looking on as we were, an audience of silvery hobgoblins at a superior height. Below them a White Ensign was tranquilly unrolling from a flagstaff. That was all. No; distantly, a great number of circular cloudlets of shrapnel were forming instantaneously and soundlessly, livid patches in the blue. A column of dark smoke leaned away solidly from an object out of sight. The man opposite turned from the window, and opened his newspaper. So did I. That is all.



All? Not quite, but it is most of what you see of war in its latest phase till chance blows the affair right over and around you, a surprising storm. And chance is sure to do that, and you may not have long to wait. This, as the train drew away from battle, I did not know. I

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assumed the affair at that port was incidental, a touch to keep us reminded that our foe could show himself anywhere in our islands; but we knew that already.

Three hours later we were ending our journey, with a short walk below barren hills to our porch. The land was so calm with a prescience of autumn that we forgot war was about. By a seventeenth-century barn a group of soldiers were lounging. As we neared them I saw them stiffen. They began to star-gaze in the afternoon. Of course, we did the same. From an ambush of fair-weather cumulus overhead came a continuous rattling of machine-guns. Cartridge cases showered about us, but we paid no attention to that by-product of battle; which was foolish of us, for where the cases are, there the bullets are also. Where were those planes? Nothing was aloft but a ferocious noise. Through a clear chasm in the clouds we thought once we could discern some scintillating mites. An intermittent droning from one cloud, a sergeant by me was confident, was that of a "Jerry." A tiny silver butterfly flew off the rim of it and melted in another cloud. As he spoke a Spitfire sang low from over the hill behind us and went up into that concealment as sharply as a rocket. We heard two bursts from a gun, there was a pause, and then a flaming meteor dropped from the belly of the cloud, head first, rotating, with a long tail red as burnished copper following it. "Got-tim!" murmured the sergeant. A fountain sprang high

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close to the beach. We waited for whatever was next. The noise had ceased. The soldiers said they had seen four other Jerries drop farther out to sea.



While I continued to gaze upwards vacantly, I cannot say for what, a Spitfire fell from a cloud, a mile out. Another followed it. They dropped obliquely shorewards to destruction, but saved themselves in unison—I heard myself exclaim when they were about to strike the beach. Both upended, and rolled easily away from disaster, in a sort of elegant hilarity. The sergeant gunner chuckled. "They always do that after a show."

Not till next day did we hear that our island had been attacked by continuous droves of planes. Nearly fifty had fallen along our own stretch of coast, in as short a time as it took our defenders to become aware that at last they were engaged in a decisive affair. When one attack was dispersed another swarm from France approached the land. We have had many such occasions since, and some of them worse. Along the dim ridges of the hills every night the searchlights radiate and intersect, and are often brilliant enough to put out the Milky Way. Soon we are listening to the enemy. His power vibrates, and one wishes one knew precisely how to locate it. It seems prevalent. At times there is a flash and a burst from him, or from them, and the walls shudder. Somebody near has caught it. The guns roll

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around the night. Their round expansions of shrapnel are as if orange glow-lamps were festooned aloft and glittered in a desultory way. Metal showers rain and rattle down. Through these doings in the dark, the lord star Jupiter eyes all magnificently, his survey by no means intermittent. Somehow, I am glad of that.



Morning comes again, not too soon—indeed, we are pleased to meet it—and tales of the night before begin to arrive from our neighbours. Some discipline is then applied to the mind, firmly, to enable progress to be made with whatever task one has in hand. In evening there is a stroll to the inn. Men from the garrison drop in, at the hour for the broadcast, when we get the day's news. There have been, the announcer says, attacks everywhere, as usual. We knew that. We have had some; but all the soldiers want to hear is "the scores for the day." (I use their own phrase for it.) Sometimes it is seven to one against Jerry; now and then it drops to two to one. It might be a Test Match. It is clear that the notion of defeat never occurs to them.



In London, as elsewhere, the war is accepted as an unavoidable inclemency. The hour of a storm cannot be forecast, and though it is sure to strike some time that day, and probably more than twice, work ought to be

done. Wheels must be kept turning. Man is the most adaptable of all animals. In the heavens, suddenly, the detonations begin their larks, dammit, right over the Sunday dinner. It is advisable to leave that on the table, and descend to the dug-out. Your neighbours will be there, also without their dinners, but with cards and gramophone. During the hours of work, though, only perfunctory attention is given to the siren. Ten minutes are bestowed on a shelter, as formal acknowledgment of kindly official instructions, and then, unless ruin has come close, men and women go up to their tasks. Mustn't waste time! But what a cold hatred of the Nazis accumulates! "They shall pay for this!" decided the aged shopkeeper in the by-street, when she came out to rescue from plaster and broken glass what was left of her stock. Many of us are in full sympathy with her, for one reason or another. "Last time," mused an onlooker, "the Kaiser ran to Holland. Where will Hitler go?" It was then seen, with complete satisfaction, that he has nowhere to go. For we are all aware that this ruin of a continent need not have happened, but the Nazis had resolved, with religious fervour, to make it. "Right," once defined by the German Minister of Justice, "is what is in the interests of the German *Volk*; wrong is what harms it."

After that, there was no more to be said. There was but one thing to do. Could it be done? Last June not

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sufficient reason existed to show that it could be. Today the test is past. It is being done. Our men have taken the measure of the Nazis. The British air-fleet was comparatively small, but it has already destroyed the legend that German propaganda had created of the invincibility of Hitler's Luftwaffe; and his army is left standing where Parma's stood. In this war of the spirit against machines cruelly directed, the machines encountered at first but a broken spirit, and flew on in triumph. They encountered, over the English Channel, a spirit debonair and resolute, well-equipped, and during August the German Armada was spilled from the skies.



I do not know how to write of those men who, few in number, went up on wings to avert Nazi dominion of Christendom. Who could do that, in the uproar of a war continuing? Some have already called it an epic story, a theme for a poet when, in a time to come, he can look back in tranquillity; but I do not know how the silent gratitude of a multitude of many humble and contrite hearts can become loud in the splendour of great verse. For youth in the air not only saved the day for us; it turned back what seemed to be the oncoming of an age of darkness for many nations. How picture that?



Meanwhile, those same fliers are giving the Nazis an

experience from which Germany has been free for over a century. Germany, after long last, is now invaded. Hitler has brought that about. The destruction Berlin designed for others is visiting her own precincts. What Berliners rejoiced to hear had been done to Rotterdam and Warsaw is being returned to them. I do not want to exult. That, too, is hateful. There is cruelty enough in the world without adding to it. Nor could anyone exult after witnessing what may be seen in my own neighbourhood. One day last week we chanced on wreckage by the roadside, an extraneous mass which had crushed a hedge of whitethorn and guelder rose. A ploughman, leading a horse, stood by the wreck gravely, barcheaded. His cap was in his hand. It was the crumbled metal of a German bomber, its colours and outline grotesque in that rustic lane; and tangled with its jagged metal were the bodies of three young Germans. The ploughman merely looked at us, and made a sorrowful gesture. He pointed to the field. "Another there," he said.

It was. It was one of ours, doubtless the one which had brought down the bomber. But that smaller machine, a Spitfire, was perfect. It had landed in a difficult place with precision, and its wounded crusader had climbed out of it to rest. There he was, with his head on his arm, as if asleep.

September 1940

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September 1940: London by night has become one of the world's prodigies; and by day also occasionally, though since the several major disasters to the German air-fleet its big bombers dare not venture over the city after the sun is up. Night, any night, is when the old capital of the British is apocalyptic, a vision not believable, though there it is, and there you are. The sounds and lights of it, and the instant serration of its towers black against vivid eruptions, in which for a moment you see a familiar shape, as though to prove that it is London indeed in which you are, warrant the story that mankind is beginning another way of life. The apparitional entrance to the new age seems unpropitious, or at least very dangerous to those who would pass onward to the future.



The port of London, until now, was not one of the world's pageants. You never heard it mentioned with Penang and Rio. Nobody ever called it the Golden Gate. Instead, the estuary of the Thames opens so wide a channel for the commerce of Europe that a traveller, before the coming of this new age, was amid its mud-

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flats and shoals before he knew it. He had arrived, but nothing warned him. That small object the Nore lightship? Is that all?

That was about all, except the broad waters. He had no desire to cheer. The coast of the lowlands, even when it can be made out, is never more than thin markings to divide the upper and the nether light. In the wind and rain, it suggests but the tenuous subsistence of life. Still, did your ship ever move up Thames when day was declining into the smoke? Why then, of course, one was apt to feel less important than one did a little earlier. There ahead was the daunting admonition of the past. That penumbra of an ancient establishment of men, the loom of their tradition, was in contest with the flames of the very sun. It was London.

*

All the same, our city is not beautiful. To say so would be going too far. You must listen to Charles Lamb for its enticement, and he, born in the Temple off Fleet Street, was prejudiced, as well as a poet. Poets have unusual tastes and odd views. Wordsworth, from a Thames bridge one sunrise, felt only then that London was revealed. He was deeply moved. Herman Melville, leaning on the parapet of London Bridge the morning he came to see us, took in the sullen Pool, and understood he was with his own. So he was. From there had departed the navigators for the discovery of

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seas and coasts, from Hudson, Davis, and Frobisher to Scott. Just below Melville, on the south side, was the mooring place of the *Golden Hind*, where Elizabeth went to knight Drake on his return from Acapulco and the Moluccas. Shakespeare learned what he knew of ships and shipmen along that waterfront. His theatre was near.

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Yet we must fall back on the truth. London is not comely and personable. It loses itself in wide diffusion. No traveller, staying briefly in the city where the Thames is said to be somewhere about—though he hardly ever knows where—but is forced to admit it. I should have to admit it myself, and I am a Londoner. There is also the Fulham Road, Euston, Islington, Canning Town and Bermondsey; and numerous other such places and parishes, though in every one of them you can find something nearly as good as the George Tavern of Southwark, where Sam Weller was first seen while cleaning boots. Yet London is not a rival of Paris, Edinburgh, New York, or Istanbul. We can only say that because of its site on a kindly river, between the eastern and western land masses of the earth, London is performing today the office once held by Bruges and Venice. We remember there was an Industrial Revolution—we are not allowed to forget it, since it continues to a very ominous din—and then pots and pans for the many became vastly more important than silks and spices

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for the few. London found itself in the providential place on its river so friendly to ships, for iron and coal were at hand. It had been growing fairly fast since Chaucer was a collector of Customs at its wharves; and when the steam-engine came along—but no words can measure what happened to London after that. Its continental rivals began to envy it, and with cause. It paid no attention to them. It only increased still more. Nothing grows in this world that is good for something but has its mart in London, with Cockney experts whose heritage it is to grade the stuff. It has been said of Fenchurch Street Station that the other end of the line is in China. And what seafarer does not know the East India Dock Road? Go along it one way, and you come to Westminster Abbey; the other way takes you to landfalls in all the seas. Choose the one you want.



Though it would be prudent of you, at present, to postpone your choice. That historic road to the docks of London is unattractive, except to hostile aircraft. Do you remember Ypres, and what the Menin Gate was to it, in the long ago? You ventured towards that eastern gate at your peril. Ypres, the stumps of it, was in a desperate salient. So is London now, and its Dockland is at the dangerous extremity of its vast sweep into the region of war. Tennyson warned us that it might happen, and it has come about. Navies are in fact

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grappling in the central blue, and London is under them. It is a battleground. Such is the progress of science, to say nothing of morals, that the altar, the hospital and the nursery are promoted to the place of honour, as paladins used to call the critical sector in battle. They are not only in the front line, but that part of it which must be kept at all hazards. London, in the chances of the Nazi revolt against civility, has become the main smoking bastion in the defence. You can call this the Battle of London; and in truth Austerlitz and Waterloo were brief and petty affairs in comparison, of smallish size and soon over, decisive in a day.



In the early summer we surmised that Hitler might not attack London, fearing for Berlin. And why ruin Buckingham Palace before he entered it in triumph, to announce the new way of life for all peoples revealed to him on Walpurgis Night? But his plans have been torn across. Our airmen have not waited for the German army to come to us; they have gone over to meet it. The war has been carried into Germany, and the means for invasion disarrayed and scattered before Hitler could set them moving against us. Yet if London's many millions could be terrorized? If panic should come of destruction, and the work of the capital cease, despair take hold, and London welcome any sort of quiet?

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That was worth the effort, though Berlin had to pay for it. London's schools and hospitals, therefore, are in the front line. Surgeons and nurses, those that survive, must burrow into collapsed masonry and steel to discover which of their patients survive. And where a nursery was at bedtime won't always bear looking at in the morning.

On your way to the office by the usual train—if you yourself were lucky during the night—you may have to lie on the floor of the carriage, the train at a stand, while listening to the horrific coming of a torpedo. The time you have for wondering whether it will get you seems long. Then it bursts. If you hear it go off, most likely you are still all right. But you will be late for work. You may have to walk the rest of the way, holding firmly your hope for the best, while the battle continues in the sky.



Children used to know an old game, with a rhyme, "London Bridge has fallen down . . . London's burning, London's burning." We have had nights when it seemed that had come about. There have been nights when fiends appeared to be at that game in reality, for the scale was past human scope; such a night was an inexplicable confusion of raving noises and flares, above us the heavens rent, and flames and clangour bursting upwards from opened hell. Would the ordinary sun

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ever rise again, to throw light on what was left : Stunned thoughts made no answer to that. But another day did come, and there stood the spires of London, as if we had been dreaming badly the night before ; you could have believed you had, except that smoke continued to roll away, the houses of neighbours had gone, and the stories began to come in. You will not know those stories till all is over, and I don't suppose you will then. The rescue and ambulance parties are unable to say what they saw and did. The abominable thing can only be whispered.



The battle goes on. As an old soldier said to me the other night, looking to gun-flashes playing like summer lightning over and around London, hearing the continuous salvoes from thousands of guns, and the shrapnel bursting aloft in meteoric swarms, "This is like Flanders the night before a push." This time, however, his children are in it. Hate is upon us ; the nurtured malignity of envy is satisfying its old grudge. Our ancient establishment, as we had been threatened, is suffering destruction. This is the hour. Those infernal lights, those numbing eruptions, portend our fate. Yet, when morning is around early once more, and you look straight at your neighbour, as he does at you over the fence, and neither of you say anything, but give each other with great gravity the Nazi salute, variegated with

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the Communist clenched fist, as an afterthought, there London still is; and the city folk are already passing along for their train, each holding his hope for the best, and another day is beginning. But another warning will have gone before that train reaches its terminus, with more warnings and crashes to follow before the inclement dazzle of gunfire puts out the stars again, as usual. Day after day, night after night. There comes no end to it. The broadcaster tells you of a block of flats, a school, a public shelter, or a hospital being struck. Dear God! where, this time? You are thinking of those you know. Yet it is wrong to bother the telephone girls. They have enough to do. Perhaps some of them will never return to duty. You must wait. That is why, when we get letters, we carefully check their postmarks with the last news reported of explosions in the neighbourhood of those addresses. The suspense, the bearing of such a tension without showing it, needs fortitude. And the way one's own folk bear up, as a sailor would say, steer towards duty, holding as near as they can manage into the storm, gives you a respect for ordinary men and women that otherwise you might not have found. Those Cockneys! They deserve a word. Their bastion smokes, but it is there. They hold.



London stands. What will the Nazis do next? No-

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body knows, not even the Nazis. In Germany there is a frenzied man whose vision of life came of hypnosis through brooding over the nebulous coils of Teutonic mythology; and those legends and fabulous shapes, we are told, were born in the fears of savages amid the gloom of pine forests. To him a dream of Thor's thundering hammer is what the glory of the Lord was to Moses. Such a dream could grow spears, but make nobody's bread and butter. But this fanatic is the leader of the Germanic tribes, and has taught them that spilling life magnifies something or other, and they believe, and follow him, eyes glazed, to a promised land, while the waters of the world, we can only conjecture, are to be piled as miraculous walls on either hand as they pass over. It is no good dismissing this as of the spooks, and a nightmare. We know that, yet the fantasy has sufficient reality to explode a torpedo over the high altar of St. Paul's Cathedral. Nelson one day was shaken in his tomb by it. One of its imps ruined the old hall where *Twelfth Night* was first performed, when its author was in the cast, perhaps to display the modern ascendancy of Caliban over Ariel. Goldsmith's burial-place has suffered, and Lamb's birth-place. Do these names mean anything to you? This Germanic nightmare is one from which Londoners cannot escape by awakening, for they walk in it, wide awake, apprehensive of the next appearance of its horrible spectres. The ride

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of the Valkyries is seen and heard over Paternoster Row.



As anyone who keeps his wonder over the mystery of human nature would have guessed—anyone, that is, except men whose faith is based on the evil in us—the Nazi attempt to break the spirit of the citizens in the centre of the British Commonwealth has raised an unexpected power against Hitler. He may lose the war because of it. It was apparent, when that man was first noticeable, that the energy of his followers came of resentful brutishness acting where reason was disconcerted and ignorance was free from restraint. He and his men till the other day knew nothing of Londoners; and not a few of the British, who did, were doubtful of their quality. Yet see what happened, after his Wagnerian effort to shock those Nobodies into panic with the means by which he had crumbled other cities! Londoners are an easy-going lot. They are a medley of all the kingdom. They never show civic pride, and they have no unity. Thousands who live in such parishes as Deptford have never seen the Abbey at Westminster, and don't want to. The Guildhall of the City Fathers is less to them than the local cinema. But one day they had to view their many dead scattered among the smoking rubble of what were homes but yesterday; and now they are quiet, inconsolable, deaf to appeal, stub-

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born, sardonic, resolved. Hitler won't know what he did to himself, when he tried to break them, till he is informed. There is a blasphemy against life to be exorcized.



After all, how could such a man know the spirit abiding in London's mean streets, where the Nobodies live? He had never heard of it. That spirit is older than the Abbey. It built the Abbey. It knew the hill on which the Tower of London stands before William the Conqueror's ancestors had so much as settled in Normandy; even before the Romans arrived to build a wall to enclose the hill's east side. How ancient is the line of the Nobodies! Why, that east side of London, beyond the Roman wall of the city, now taking the worst shocks of the Nazis' assaults, had been a battleground in Alfred's reign, and before then. East-enders today know a Roman Road, for so it is still called, but few of them know it was a causeway of the original Britons, and that Aulus Plautius but used it when he marched against the sons of Cymbeline, to suffer a good hiding in the Lea marshes, and there had to wait, by Old Ford, till the Emperor Claudius came to his aid. A stiff-necked generation about there even then gave the Romans a deal of trouble. Near Old Ford is a shabby little turning we know as Priory Street. You recall what Chaucer said of a prioress and the kind of French she spake in her

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nose? Her Benedictine convent stood where those small houses and cheap shops are now. Pay no attention, for the moment, to the desolation Hitler has spread around near by. That convent was founded by Edgar, about 960, on the advice of Dunstan, who then was lord of Stepney Manor. These origins are everywhere in London within the silence of time past. The ghosts are in all its ways. Do not suppose our city is only a world market. For my part, I know the quay where Conrad's *Torrens* used to berth, and saw her alongside. Do not suppose our ships carry only cargoes. And it is still something to us Londoners, we haven't forgotten it, though it was long ago, that Wat the Tyler, an early stalwart for the rights of free men, died at Smithfield, a short walk from the Benedictine convent. Our forefathers stood up to the matter in that distant year, but it is doubtful that any Nazi has read *A Dream of John Ball*, by William Morris. For the folk of London and its neighbourhood were ever a difficult people, strict for their privileges, which they had won from kings, and hopeful of still better times. Their kings learned to respect them, and had reason.



What a long journey it is from the sons of Cymbeline to Sam Weller! But it is a straight road, running from the beginning till now. One meets much the same sort of fellow all the way to where Sam is doing his best in

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a Southwark tavern, when we see him first, relishing his job, while understanding his master as well as he does his own father. Sam, we feel, is the outcome of a culture as mellow as that of the Chinese; tolerant, bantering, wary, derisive while helpful, able to keep his footing when others fall, kindly even to the high and mighty, having seen them many a time and knowing the way of all flesh; greeting heroics and eloquence with the wry smile of those who know how easily apple-carts are upset. "Jim," exclaimed a Cockney in the last war, drawing back in surprise when his company was entering a trench for the first time, "why, this place is dangerous!" It is not for nothing that London can count its representative genius in Sam Weller, Marie Lloyd and Charlie Chaplin. If Hitler had appreciated that fact he might have preferred to wait a little longer. Now he must go on.



He learned what he knows of us from Ribbentrop, and that precocious student won his information at dinners, while ambassador in London, from a light and vain circle as remote as its lapdogs from the common English life which keeps the chimneys smoking and the wheels turning. So of course he never heard of Sam, and his surprise that such a fellow exists would be pleasant to watch. How queer it is of German knowledge, that though extensive and logically ordered, it is apt to lack

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in the only place which could turn it into wisdom ! It was for that peculiar reason, and no other, that September 1940 was what it was for Londoners. One day in the first week of that month, before the alarm had sounded, when in an instant of time the sky was terrible with war-engines, you could have supposed the halcyon bird was about to nest on the calm waters of the Thames estuary, so lofty, radiant and tranquil was the prelude to autumn. The shock of reality, uncovered in a moment, was a test of character. There was a pause of consternation. People looked at each other. Was this the thing itself ? Then the test was past. All who had duties were at their posts. The day had come.



We had better agree at once that the whole of the truth of it can never be known. We know what history is. A recorder can but give slight indications. War, that immense and blasting spectacle, is chiefly what takes place in the lonely heart, and that is an unimportant matter. A man suffers in his flesh alone, Duhamel told us in the last war, and so wars go on. Shall we put down what has happened, when a mother extracts her child from brickbats, and it is dead ? Or say what is in a father's mind, after he has hurried home, to make sure of that place at least, to find all his street but unrelated dust, and smoking ? Is there anything to be said ? There is

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nothing one can say ; and yet, just there, in that moment, in the smouldering rubbish of homes, where the dead still are, is the truth of high politics, hitherto known only to the privileged. Now the recondite is revealed. It has come down at last to no more than a mother, who holds a dead child, and doesn't know what to do with it, for she has nowhere to go.



That part of London east from Aldgate Pump to Tilbury Docks I ought to know well. Visitors rarely go that way. There is nothing to see. They view the Pool from Tower Quay or London Bridge. Eastward goes London River, as sailors call the stream, to the Maplin and Nore lights. It is London's main highway. Twice a day the sea comes up to fill the heart of the capital. The sea makes a difference, and schools those who know it to the presence of peril. I don't suppose Ribbentrop knew that, or ever went as far in London as Poplar, Canning Town and such riverside parishes, so he would be unaware of what was sure to happen if ever German war-planes dropped their loads over them. A friendly but contumacious people, there. They have always been inclined to march with banners, when the mood came over them ; though as they are but dockers, sailors, engineers, shipwrights, lightermen, stevedores and what not, they are never seen in fashionable

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circles; which is a pity, because knowledge of what takes place when they are upset does not sufficiently circulate.



I remember, too, that in the last war I used to write of the heartening worth of the soldiers of the rear-guard, their fortune a cross-roads, and what was to come to be there soon. For in life, as in reading, one has to take, as a matter of course, so many stories of human frailty amid the squalor of existence, that to witness, once in a way, a few men fix their harness somewhat firmer, and lie down, very quiet, ready for death that their comrades may get clear, is almost the same as hearing very certainly the clarion of a heavenly messenger. I used to think so; for yes, how usual is human frailty! But I have learned since how common is valour, though when things are well we do not see it in the strangers about us, because no special call has come. That, today, is an assurance of a better world, if we survive, and if we will it. It was not soldiers who kept London steady when Göring's legions struck. Only one's neighbours were there. They did it. One cannot picture the elderly man we see every morning going for his train as a resolute member of the rear-guard at a fatal cross-roads. Nothing like it. He was always good at dahlias, though his literary opinions are inappropriate, but no soldier. There he

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was—there he still is—cool while shrapnel smacks about, walls are toppling, fires must be put out, and the dead and wounded taken from a stricken shelter, while the whooping of Hitler's business still goes on about him. The fires springing up in unexpected places do not dazzle him. I was unaware mettled people were so numerous. Valour seems ordinary in ordinary men and women. Very likely it comes of a natural revolt against iniquity, a native hatred of cruelty. Yet these people show no hate, only a shocked ruth, only a slow anger. There was a slight girl, better used, I should guess, to a draper's counter, who took an ambulance party of her own sort into a neighbourhood that resembled Sodom and Gomorrah on the last day. She remarked later that she could not see her way very well because there was so much smoke and dust, and the walls were coming over. When more bombs began to spread more walls, her girls could not lie down, she pointed out, because broken glass covered the road. Besides, it did not seem to matter. She found and brought out the helpless. Tell me, are not medals and decorations out of date? They discriminate, where there is nothing to distinguish. I love my Cockneys.



If, when the man to create *Moby Dick* looked down Thames from London Bridge, his visit had been as late

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as the night of September the Seventh 1940, he would have seen something out of reach of words. He would have thought he was present at the final act, the culmination of that long conflict between good and evil which had long preoccupied him ; and there are no words for that known to men. His fear for human destiny, should pride in folly continue to challenge powers unknown, would have told him that he was the last man, the lone spectator of the sacrifice to Abaddon of all the efforts of mankind. The story was ending. Others appeared to be beside him at the bridge's parapet, but they were no more than an audience of phantoms, gaping, as he was himself, at the scene in which all human aspiration was going up in smoke ; phantoms they were, and their day was past ; and the smoke of all they had done was worthy of unfortunate yet heroic ways, billowing and raging amplitudes of smoke, scarlet, orange, gold, purple and silver, the ascending inflammables of ambition and pride. These silent figures beside him, watching with him, were nothing but masks lacquered red by the flames of the hot gulf along the gloomy verge of which they floated. Could that be London ? This used to be its place. Those shadowy shapes were of the Pool, and there the Norman battlements of the Tower were also, as ever ; but all shook and pulsed, as if resolving into their incandescent elements, and would pass with everything, pass with the flames. The Thames moved below as a river of blood.

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That quavering wail he heard was the uprising of man's universal dismay.

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No, not quite. One of the phantoms beside him moved abruptly, and spoke. "Hey, out of it you. Down below. Here the blighters come again." The wraith was off, as a galaxy of sparks rose in the distance, followed by a blast. There were, that night, watchers on the hills in the suburbs who feared that London was done for, and who were heartened, next morning, when there it stood, but for its canopy of vapour. They took their trams, not without more difficulty than usual, found the dear old place veritably existed, and did what work they could in it. Ruins were fewer than they expected to find, though there were more than enough; but when the stories from their friends in the eastern parishes began to arrive, they understood well that something had happened which could never be overlooked, never, for it marked a turning point in the history of civilization. Beyond a peradventure, they knew what must be done. Not for nothing is there a London tradition, though in easy days it can be forgotten.

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So we go on. There are nights in London, moon lighted, altogether new to the old city, which are as beautiful and strange as in a space apart from tribulation. A street in the city, abandoned to only that pale light,

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is as eerie as the palace Kubla Khan decreed. It waits. One keeps to the shadow of a wall, as though in wary desecration of a place not meant for footfalls. For the wailing note has sounded. There is a whistle and a crash, it is hard to say where, and across a turning in the light of the moon goes a group of helmeted figures at the double. It looks theatrical. It might be of the films, but it is wiser to accept it as present reality, and dive underground, if you have time for it, and if refuge is at hand.

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It should be said now, for this is the place, that but for one fact not even the stout hearts of Londoners could have saved their city from destruction. Their courage would have been unavailing. Faith saved them, as they cut off roaring gas mains, stopped the cataracts from fractured conduits, doused the volcanoes, got out the dead and dying. For citizens, though they heard the battle continuous in the clouds, and on certain days saw the gigantic hieroglyphics written on the heavens by the exhaust vapours of invisible engines, could rarely make out anything of it. It was in the heights. They knew their young gallants were aloft; navies were grappling in the central blue. Yet all they could do was to pray that all went well up there.

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It went well. And, though we had faith in our aerial

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fleet, as in the ships at sea, we were dumbfounded when we heard the measure of victory. Nelson himself could not have asked for more. The enemy had been showered down. He is cruel, that enemy, for chivalry is expunged from his code, yet his fall is a dreadful sight. One day, during the affair, I was looking out over the waters. Sombre cumulus clouds poised in a brooding air were themselves sufficiently awful with the rays of a declining sun pouring through apertures. The unseen war was among them. Three vast fountains uprose on the calm sea, and stood strangely, as long as while we wondered whether they were planes or bombs. A livid ball appeared, and zigzagged down the bulge of a thunder cloud, as if it were phenomenally slow lightning. That was a plane, and it was dying. A sharper rattle of machine-guns took our eyes to a cloud overhead. We shrank within ourselves. A Messerschmitt came at us. There was no time to move. It magnified from a bright toy to a dire meteor, dropping head first, body smoking, arms helplessly outspread, and plunged. One is not likely to forget it. We stood, for another unseen plane seemed to be following immediately and directly at us, with an increasing drone which shuddered one's bones with its power. Only when that sound had passed did we realize that it was the dying cry of the Messerschmitt following its body down.

The cloud from which the German had fallen moved

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on. It uncovered, in a depth of blue, a fleet of Hurricanes and Spitfires, bright and tiny as white moths, in leisurely evolutions, heading east, on easy duty bent, driving the enemy to sea out of England.

January 1941

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January 1941: As we all know, London's cathedral appears uplifted. The dilation of the dome of St. Paul's floats the fabric above the capital. Its peristyle columns have held it to earth for several centuries, but it seems ever at the instant of release and of soaring. The cathedral, in fact, surmounts Ludgate Hill. That hill was the nucleus around which London became. Amid the aboriginal spread of the Thames into marsh and mere, the hill on which the cathedral stands once made dry landing for the coracles of men dressed in wolf-skins. Our fathers have told us the Romans had a temple to Diana there while St. Paul was still at Ephesus. It is possible a shrine topped it, even earlier than Diana's, to a god whose name Londoners have forgotten, unless it was that of Lud himself, the river god of the Celts.



That hill was, and is, the heart of London. It is a traditional gathering place of citizens, and thither they

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still go to sing on New Year's Eve. St. Paul's is the only token of communion and fellowship known to every Londoner. It beckons to all of us. You can see that dome, its cross crowning it, from Hampstead, from the Surrey hills, and far off when in the Lea valley to the east, an uplifted signal, constant amid the shifting glitter and the smoke. When approaching St. Paul's from Fleet Street, poets, looking up, have fancied they saw more in the cathedral's terminal golden cross held over the capital than the men of commerce busy everywhere below with their eyes on the pavement looking to the future. Yes, and Wren's great masterpiece, majestic and imponderable, does rise over London like an outburst of alleluia.



The other night we nearly lost it. The area of the city around the cathedral happens to be the western limit of a vast mart of the mercers. London is like that. The merchants in tea, spices and sugar are down by Eastcheap, Oriental treasures are near Houndsditch, the fishmongers by Billingsgate, the shipowners and brokers around Leadenhall Street, money is in Threadneedle Street, wine near the Tower, and corn and coal are in Mark Lane. When you know what you want in London, you can be told where to go and find it, though I expect you would be watched. The precincts of St. Paul's, and east down Cheapside, and north to London Wall, and

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south along Cannon Street, is known to the fire-brigade as the "danger zone." A warehouse for furbelows is a worry to a night watchman; but when many warehouses of that sort stand together, even before the days when anarchists could fly, those buildings set fire-engines going by the mere show of a vagrant light, for embedded in the narrow passages dividing them are numerous ancient churches and other signs of faith and labour past. I saw, when a youth, a complicated mile of those alleys going up like Etna when busy, in the Jewin Street quarter. A city bobby—amiable fellows, those City of London police, and giants—stopped me while I was making an artful cut through the yard of St. Giles, Milton's church. "Let me pass," I pleaded, "I must get to my office." "Where is it, son?" he asked, and I told him. "Pinch a day off," he said, "it isn't there this morning."



In that particular patch of the danger zone, so long ago, it happened the only relics of the past were the place-names; nothing was lost but many acres of premises. But on the night of December 29th, 1940, you could see, in hollow dismay, that more was burning than premises. It was the most terrible spectacle most Londoners will ever witness. Devastation was loose. There is a suburban hill a few miles south of St. Paul's, and its name is Beulah, though I cannot help that; the Victorians, if

hearty, were pious. It was the wrong name for it that night, anyway. From that high ground, South London spreads low to the Thames and the City.



Christmas was over. We had returned to daily affairs. There had been no bombing. What was to come next? For of course we watch and wait for Hitler's grand sortie, without much of an idea of what he will do, except that he will do the worst he can think of, and we know the way his thoughts go round. As night fell, quite suddenly, he did something which, by the show of it, was intended, as a prelude, to break the heart.

A strange light was without, but no noise, except the guns and the drone of enemy planes, and Londoners now accept those sounds as they do wet days. The glow penetrated the black-out curtains, as if the impossible had happened, and day had returned because it had forgotten something; for you must know the rising sun sparkles through the severest of black-outs, praise God. What miraculous sort of day was this? And there, the black-out down, it was. We would not have to bother so much tonight about keeping our windows covered. All the City of London was radiant. The dome of St. Paul's was afloat in mid-ocean flames. It floated, but at times it was engulfed, and we thought it had gone; then the fiery tide lowered, and the cathedral was above the capital as ever, except that it was red-hot. There was no

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need now for a policeman to tell us what thing was this. Not only St. Paul's, and the sky above it, but all Wren's fleet of steeples, and the treasured imprints and outlines of our heritage, were ardent and reeking. London was extravagantly a furnace. Now we knew the emotion of Londoners in 1666, when they saw their immemorial city, the one Shakespeare knew, disappearing street after street.



What did we say? We did not speak. There was nothing to be said. St. Paul's was going. We saw, in the light of that destruction, that we should have to begin anew, whatever our prejudices. The past was being blotted out. We only watched that. The barrage balloons sat aloft in the night, also watching, an audience of grotesques with bright faces intently turned to the spectacle, and very still. We did not even curse Hitler.

St. Paul's, when looked for next daylight, was there; it had survived, it still presided. But London had more smoke than was comfortable. The cathedral was there, but you had better know that as the Nazis have shown especial malice for it we cannot promise you shall see it the next time you come. The wonder is it was there. The apparition of the flames engulfing it the night before was not illusory. It was the hub of a conflagration. It was near the fate of old St. Paul's. As close as one dared go, I have been revisiting the glimpses. I suppose I knew,

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when a youth, all the pavements between the Tower and St. Martin's le Grand. There was the Guildhall, for one choice recess, in the midst of that region. It had a library, a refuge with silence aside from the haste and botheration of commerce. If you dropped a slip of paper into a box, and retired to a favourite corner, very soon your book was put before you, as many books as you liked to ask for, and then, where nobody would have thought of looking for you, exempt for a spell from bills of lading and freight accounts, you could sit in a time coeval with the foundations of the Guildhall; and when they were laid goes back to near the beginning. A boy was in his ancestral home. After such an interval, he could resume duty upon documents for famous ships, certain of his part in the broad stream of life. His relationship with these old stones, and those ships of London, if humble, was as sure as his name.



I have wondered since whether I did well to go over the ground again, after its second Great Fire. It was not the body that could stand no more of it, but the eyes, weary of seeing. Nothing tires the spirit so much as a contemplation of waste, the waste of good. Malice is depravity. All seems undone. London this day is a warning against attempts to negotiate with the diabolical. Londoners see and smell daily what happens if you try to appease that. How plead with men whose

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sole acknowledgment of virtue is to simulate it for the easier undoing of good ?



Did you know Paternoster Row ? You would not know it now. There is no Row. I stood to view it where a famous publishing house used to be, but that house was only one high screen, perforated and tottery, of calcined limestone. Beyond it was vacancy, going back I could not see how far because of smoke and steam and oblique ghostly girders. Half-burnt books were filth in the gutters. The rest of the Row was impassable, and the smell was of finality.



Much else has gone. I attempted causeways once familiar to me down Cheapside ; for one, the paved court with the pleasant name of Honey Lane Market. It used to have comfortable eighteenth-century shops. There was a sound this day of burning timbers settling, and the hissing of water. On the blind window-sill of one vanished shop a jocular fireman had placed a white classic bust to overlook the wreckage, and had stuck a sport's cap on it at a saucy angle. That fireman would be a young man ; and let us hope—we shan't be far out, either, if we do—that all young Londoners feel as he did. From there we turned, and had a peep through a narrow opening across Cheapside. It was just wide enough to

frame the steeple of St. Mary le Bow, the church of Bow Bells, the bells heard once upon a time by Dick Whittington, so the story goes. We were told it was the last sight we should have of that Wren steeple, "considered by some authorities to be the finest Renaissance campanile in the world." Maybe it was, so there must be another Renaissance, for the steeple must go. Today it is only dangerous. Working a way through streets I fancied I had forgotten, I came upon the shell of the Guildhall, and beside it a Wren church which had an interior to accord with Bach's fugues: St. Lawrence Jewry. It was roofless. Its windows were patches of ragged sky. Near by, in Coleman Street, I was reminded of scenes in the cities of Rheims, Ypres and Arras, in another war. This is the second occasion for such vistas in the lives of some of us, and it is too much. One can only suppose the Nazis hate the mellow civility of old cities, and will destroy them when they can; after all, if you think about it, the uncivil naturally hate the gracious ways of urbanity. We have had many books already to tell us why France and Belgium collapsed at a push, and why with such disheartening ease the Germans goose-stepped into Scandinavia and Holland; no halt at all till they had to stand before Dover's white cliffs, which were across the water. With a memory of the wreckage that was Rheims and Arras—hundreds of French cities, towns and villages were reduced to muck, in the last war

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—recalled by the present spectacle of Basinghall Street, which is London, other reasons for the downfall were suggested. It is easy to be unfair to France, for we never felt her torture as she felt it herself.



The truth is, when the grisly head was uplifted as an oriflamme by the Nazis in Berlin in 1933, France did not want to believe what she saw. Nor did the British; nor the Americans. It could not be true. But it was Death. Clear into last April our good neighbours in Europe continued in their failure to recognize the brutish as its tanks were on the move, bringing doom along. They held desperately to their belief that this was not the age for perdition; that man in his progress to better things was well past the bone heaps, and that everybody knew it. Our friends could not adjust their minds in time to the necessity for supporting with deeds their modern faith that light is better than darkness. They did not understand that the rumbling they heard was dire and phenomenal, was the coming of engines to put a stop to their development of a civilized order.



They heard in fact the growling of the guns and tumbrils of another revolution on its way, a revolution contrary to that of the eighteenth century. This revolution was to end the nonsense of reason, liberty and the

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rights of man. Our neighbours could not believe it. The liberty of the person was as unquestionable as the ordering of the stars. Indeed it had some relationship with the courses of the stars. That, I think, is why the German brass bands bashing out triumph in Oslo at first merely puzzled and amused the pacific Norwegians. As for the French, I think I understand now that they never recovered from the grief and horror left when Cease Fire sounded in 1918. The Americans and the British have not clearly seen that ; it was not our treasures which were broken, not our fair lands mutilated and defiled. Ought we not to have expected abhorrence of war to abide with a sensitive and intelligent people ? It did, anyhow. They shrank behind their fortifications from its recurrence. The Maginot Line was the measure of their dread. If that material defence was a mistake, what else was a folk to do, that had been wounded almost to death ? The French are still numb. I myself have seen what came over some British men and women, who suffered last time, when the black wings again darkened the morning. All the controlled emotion of four tragic years, which they had borne without complaint, came into their eyes. What, again ? They could not believe it, they could not, though they accepted their gas-masks. I myself, doubting the possibility of evil in the ascendant, worked and spoke for accord with the Germans through the last war, and up to Munich. Hitler's descent on

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Prague to plunder it a few months after his avowal that he wanted peace, told the most reluctant of us that Germany would work her will, whatever her fair words, though Europe were whitened with bones. It was repellent, but it was a fact. The revolution had begun, which was to counter the revolutions of the English, the French, and the American colonists, to end feudalism, and to win liberty for the humble. We were back in the dark.



I suppose I had better not speak too loudly of other ruins in London, and elsewhere; we don't want to hear rejoicing in the wrong place. But you may tell your informant he is ignorant if he says the aim of Nazi bombers is for military objects. They are attempting to do in London what they did on the Continent, divide the people from their rulers, and turn the anger of the multitude against the government. A bomb launched on a parachute cannot be aimed, but if it drifts over an area of tenements for the workers, then presently, on contact anywhere below, it will blast to the ground a parish of rickety houses. This the Nazis do. These poor people never had much, but that has gone, and sometimes the children with it. As I can say little about it, don't suppose this affects me less than the loss of antiquities. Where this cruel destruction is I was born. And though those industrial dwellings ought never to

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have been built, being nothing more than an open confession of inequity, and beauty does not suffer, yet the loss of a choice piece of Grinling Gibbons is nothing when Rachel is weeping for her children.



So let us go back through Cheapside. Here is Bird-in-Hand Court, where in 1816 Keats lived and wrote many of the poems of his first volume. Tom Hood was born near that court. That is Bucklersbury. Once it was a market of the druggists. You remember Falstaff's comment? "Those lipping hawthorn buds, that smell like Bucklersbury in simple time." In this other street Milton was born. The Mermaid Tavern stood here, and Shakespeare lodged near by. Barham of the Ingoldsby Legends was incumbent of St. Augustine's over there; but whether that church has quite gone too I did not venture to see. One need not continue, for this heart of London touches so much of English literature, from Chaucer to Lamb, that silence is best. We may say, anyhow, that those names are all recent, relatively. Was there not Saxon work in Bow Church? Here London began in wattle and daub, and Ben Jonson and Donne were only late comers. It is as if I sat turning over the works of those great fellows, in the Guildhall, not long after they had gone. You could feel, in the quiet of that place, that they were your contemporaries. Only when

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in the street again did you realize the present, which for youth is provisional, and all promise.



What else, when its origin was long before King Alfred's day? In his reign the moot or meeting place of Londoners was St. Paul's. It must have been so for centuries before that, as there is a tradition of a Christian church on the summit of the hill in the second century. Therefore, on the last night of 1940, immediately after their second Great Fire, the smoke still hanging about, Londoners gathered there as ever to greet this New Year with a shout, and some singing. The thought of more explosions made no difference; and because many of our Cockneys say they are Scotch, you must, in the finale, join in singing Auld Lang Syne. You would have found no dismay, no gloom except the proper one of midnight, nothing to show these people stood in peril. There was rousing good cheer.



But anger, a reserved anger, the Nazis have engendered, with their bombs that float at haphazard on parachutes, and with some other devices, but it has not turned against Winston Churchill. In this affair Winston personifies residual national humours which are evoked when the going is hard; we know him, for he is akin. They must have queer minds, those Nazis. There is no doubt they

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are quite sincere, and are genuinely incapable of understanding what Roosevelt and Churchill are talking about. They really have not heard of such men as Drake and Washington. "Abe" Lincoln to them, his mind and his speech, would be as incredible as German dishonour. Now they see what the world thinks of them as a result of their honest zeal, they are as puzzled as though they witnessed the resurrection of the dead, who unwind their wrappings in a way to show they mean to live again to somebody's disadvantage. How is this? They do not understand. They are so made. But then, they would render the Golden Bowl for guns, and make merry with their tutor Dr. Goebbels over the absurdity of things which silence others into reverence and humility.



Mr. H. G. Wells is just back with us after a visit to the United States, and he reports—and we always attend to what that great man has to say—that Americans are not interested in stained glass, but only in successes. I feel rebuked. There may be more stained glass in my view of it than is right. As to success, we on this side also are plucked up when we hear of it. Our hopeful eyes are fixed on the horizon for it all day long. It cheers even a pacifist when the grandiose arrogance of Mussolini and his cohorts is deflated by quiet men who were civilians but yesterday. Mussolini today has new and

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better information about the senility of democrats, and joy may be wicked, but we are joyful. Our successes in Africa, unimaginable some months ago when Hitler was about to march through Syria and Palestine, or somewhere, to meet Mussolini at Suez, look as clean and decisive as the abrupt intervention of Providence when tired of presumptuous fools.



Still, what is meant by stained glass? Are we to understand that this metaphorical brick through an old church window indicates the relative unimportance of aesthetic values? Does it advise us that Americans do not care when the signs of those values go under the gun-wheels or up in smoke? Then I've wasted regrets, though I continue to feel how horrible is the loss. It seems to me that if certain imponderables imaged by Mr. Wells as stained glass, are of trivial consequence, and their loss can be disregarded, and that all we need hear about is success, then victory may prove to be only the glad music of a brass band in a graveyard. Our outlook in triumph will be some economic dispensation amid ash and cinder, planned in a laboratory, with Euclid lifted up over all. At this point let us be frank about the value of ecclesiastical glaze. We would give all of it if it could restore the peace of mind of but one stricken man. I heard of such a Londoner yesterday.

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It happened that he lost his wife and three children in a recent raid, and was taken to hospital. That place was bombed the next night, and he tried to fling himself from a window, but when in the flash of another explosion he saw the blood-smeared face of the nurse who was struggling to prevent him, he came to reason, and was quiet. She carried him off. Life and reason are more important than property, even when that was shaped by the genius of Wren. Of course, the wrecking of that man's mind is as incidental in war as the burning of a Raphael. There is so much of it that it is commonplace. But oughtn't we to hear of both, since they show what is going on? And what, after all, is success? The girl who saved that man was transferred to work in a quieter corner; upset, of course; but that hospital, too, was crashed the following night, and she worked in her bare feet over broken glass to rescue other patients. Does that nurse in any way represent success? If not, what is victory?



If victory is not in the continuity of magnanimous spirit, then we are of all men most miserable. If fallen stones and broken life cannot be raised to a fairer city and fellowship, then we may resign ourselves to the midden. No flowers, by request. For how raise men, if the standards are lost? But have no fear. The magnanimous heart is common. The bare promise in it of

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a regenerated community, if we will it, should be enough to quicken minds so dry that nothing is felt when loveliness is mutilated. Think of the army of men and women who went into London to save what they could when it seemed to be going utterly. They took the hazards that will not bear thinking about afterwards. These people put in a day at their normal duties, and at night are in the front line in war; their night vigil over, they go straight to their desks and shops; they must wait for rest and sleep till the next night again. They are unpaid, for the most part. Their only reward is survival, and they don't always get it. There is another thing they have done for us, though they don't know it. Let us recall that dreary old lie of the political economists, the lie which has distressed social relations since money had a clear design to rule and to maintain its dominion; that never do we give of our best, except for profit. The compelling incentive to gain—that numbing falsity of the political fabulists! We shall continue to hear of that supposed law of our nature, though all the best that society has, the things which set the measures in our culture, came of nobility in selflessness, and not of two cents for one. The Nobodies of my country, unaware, with no thought to the matter, give in a common cause what money cannot buy. In London, one night in a recent heavy attack, a telephone call came from a hundred miles away to learn if the home was standing; a relative had heard

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that something was happening. Presently another ring, from a soldier on leave. "How is it with you? We've just put out a swarm of incendiaries about here." (Ominous pause.) "Here comes a big 'un!" (Another pause, and a bump which jerked the receiver.) "You hear that? That's a near one, I'd better go." A little later still, one in the room had a ring from his watchmen. The school was there. Its fires had been doused. Still the raid continued. We sat, listening to the shells wail over the house from a near battery. You see, through it all, the telephone girls were at the exchange boards, the taxis and buses were plying, the bakers were at their ovens, and next morning we had our newspapers to the minute, though Fleet Street had been in the thick of it.



The incentive to gain! Luckily, in addition to old stained glass, that and other ancient fallacies are going. Much of our treasure is with the potsherds, broken. Be ready to meet, however, the brusque reappearance of the wrong things at the very hour when we shall claim the freedom to give form to a country worthy of people who see in a new light. The parasitic will survive with the magnanimous. We hear even now of speculators who are buying up ruins; they see a future there, but not for us. I think they will be disappointed, for there is a war beyond the one we fight which has been going

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on since Magna Carta—or Cain and Abel—and now we know more about it than we did.



By Tower Hill there was a church which escaped the fire of 1666, mainly because of the efforts of Admiral Penn, father of William, founder of Pennsylvania; and Pepys witnessed that fire from its steeple. It has not escaped this time. The old building held much of London's long story. William Penn was baptized in it, John Quincy Adams married. There is a Roman pavement in its foundations. The Temple off Fleet Street, which was a London sanctuary, will not now bear looking at, if you used to know it. You may not be interested in stained glass, yet it is hard for a Londoner to say what he feels about the loss of it. Yet now he sees the gaps in his city, made so quickly that he has had no time to assess what has gone, he begins to learn, for the first time, that London is a palimpsest. Today is but a substitute for London yesterday. He notices this late alteration only because it came violently in a night. When by St. Paul's I was puzzled by a reference I had seen to St. Michael le Querne. Such a church, I discovered, does not exist; but it did in the thirteenth century, and corn, as you suspect, was sold near it. Sir Thomas Browne, of the *Religio Medici*, was baptized in it in 1606. Sixty years later it vanished, with most of the City, while Pepys looked on. Close to its site

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yesterday I noticed that the famous Wood Street plane tree, growing in the narrow yard which is all that remains of St. Peter Westcheap, has absurdly survived this fire, as though the Nazis had known it was protected by statute. On the iron rails beneath it fluttered scores of paper notices advising me of the new addresses of business houses burned out. Life will have its way, though "the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy."



Many of the ancient monuments, some with foundations in a past so remote that you may choose your year, went in the earlier fire which ended medieval London. Wren did not rebuild all its churches; and the truth is, and today we know it better, he did rebuild many which have been cast down since, from year to year, because their sites were enviable, money being more attractive than beauty and devotion. Just before this war began All Hallows, Lombard Street, in which Charles Wesley preached his first extempore sermon, was destroyed. It was not the Nazis, but the Ecclesiastical Commissioners who did it, despite the protests of the City Corporation and the Royal Academy of Arts. They sold it to a bank, very likely. Few people grieved over it then, but the tears of many flow fast when the Germans effect in a few weeks what proprietary rights have been doing in London for many generations. What angry outbursts, if German incendiaries had destroyed Adelphi Terrace

and old Regent Street, and not the desire for more and better rents !



Yet we need not fear that either war, or the corrosion of the idea of profit, will overcome the sense of the past, from which the ghosts rule ; we know and shall remember the invisible glory of great achievement, and the sacrifice it exacted of the body, and do not doubt the responsive liberality of the spirit of man. The form vanishes, the spirit endures. There is continuity. The common folk are usually better than their governors ; it is they who are the heirs of the tradition. Apathetic when times are easy, and government is venal, they look up, surprised by a gracious word, should it chance to come, and move to it, when things go ill.



There is a night shelter in central London, the crypt of an old church. Thousands of bones, piled breast-high, were removed from it, to make room for the living, and the late vicar, Pat McCormick—he kept at his post so long that he died there, for he was worthy of it—told me that Nell Gwynn's might be among the relics, as certainly she was buried beneath the church, nobody knew exactly where. That crypt now gives shelter at night to a big company and a mixed one. There was a simple service. It would not have kept me but for the voices of the children. Their impersonal note came clear

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and easy through the singing of the congregation, as of the chanting of presiding cherubs, "all heads and wings and no bottoms," if you shut your eyes, or looked at the dim groining. The light was not pervasive. One was underground, buried alive, but children were singing. They were singing a familiar paraphrase of a psalm. In the obscurity of the vault from which their forefathers' bones had been removed, the upturned faces of innocents making a song of time sweeping all its sons away confused my philosophy. I felt I would begin thinking anew, if I knew where to start. I did try to suppose the voice of innocence I heard was but a meaningless echo in hollow eternity; but that seemed unsatisfying and inappropriate. If there is not more than that in the appeal of loveliness, then music and poetry and architecture deceive us, and so ultimate a cheat is too much for me to accept. I believe in the Holy Ghost. To sin against loveliness is to sin against the creative spirit.

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Then a man began to speak. I could not see him, but the simple urgency of his words might have been that of one of the friars, when they, too, were innocent and unworldly, which was long ago. There was something strange in those words, in those surroundings. It is only now, not too late, but near it, that one begins to know that only righteousness can save the world. We have been nihilists. See what has happened, because of it!

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The speaker began to read the words of one of the earliest of statesmen. "See, I have set before thee this day life and good and death and evil; in that I command thee this day to love the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments . . . I call heaven and earth to record this day against you that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live."

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A raid warning had sounded long before, but he went on, as if the message must be given, whatever happens, when a dream compels. And his people, unmoved by happenings without, listened to the words of a faith which has carried men through tribulation since there were swords, usurers and tax-gatherers. If any young artists were listening to him, and I think they were, then we need not despair of dignity and comeliness in a London that is to be.

February 1941

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February 1941: Watching the flood from his Ark, and seeing no break in the sky, Noah must have doubted that anchorage would be left on earth, after this upset;

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and sighed. Talk of trying a dove! No more an oasis, never again reason at ease under the palms!



Here in England it is easy to understand his feelings. Our prospect was Noah's; havoc in full flood, old landmarks foundered, more of them nearly under, and no break in the weather. This very night, while recording that touch of nostalgia, there was an interruption; call it a blast against my shelter to remind me that chaos was without. Somebody remarked, "Here comes another." We judged the double throb of an enemy bomber increase till the noise sounded loud overhead. It diminished. That one was past. We ventured out to read the news in the sky. Some of us will recall the splendour of Jupiter, these nights of war, with Saturn just under him. There they were, rising together, alone of the host of heaven, in a cloud opening. Elsewhere flares were floating down obliquely from the raiders, dissolving brief areas in night. The keels of low clouds were discovered in pitchiness to the south by gunflashes. We felt a jolt. Two more jolts; they shook the earth. Somebody had caught it. (No wonder we are uneasy, when opening telegrams and letters!) We could see, in fact, no sign of a break in universal desolation; and I went inside again to attempt a little work, if allowed.



Our nights are all like that. What can we say of

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the way the world is going, when we may mistake Vesper, at first glance, on a calm evening, for one of the threats of battle, or overlook a stray spark, showing hell's lid is off, as an ordinary fixed star? One can rarely be sure. It is not easy to discern the nature of facts in the welter of a general uprising, and in a black-out. One odd item glimpsed in the confusion will seem as relevant as any other. All Noah could be sure of in the world about him was that the waters were beyond reason, and that he could get no bearings. There was yet another certainty for him: it was no good letting loose a dove into that, for a trial flight, not at the moment. So I feel this night, while doom groans loudly and intermittently over the plot that used to be a garden. All one can do is to ignore, as well as possible, the common ugly omens, trust to luck, and go on with a task in hand. Morning is sure to come, for the majority of us.

There remains another certainty. It is the most important fact of all, but intangible. It is difficult to verify in any particular, and its outcome is unknown. Pervading this universal disaster is the human will and mind. It is not without cause that Hitler's secret police infest most of Europe's councils, churches, factories and workshops, and that their ears attend to the talk in Germany's army and in her schools. For man's restless and inquisitive spirit, which made him what he is, has

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been known to be dangerous by rulers throughout history. The light of the mind has never been extinguished by any device of government, and never will be. Every trick for putting it out has been tried, and long before Herod slaughtered the innocents to make sure of cutting out the potential threat to his rule in one child unknown. Behind the show of the war, its histrionics, and its breathless crises, is the silent wonder of nobody in particular, and everybody in general; a host of anonymous and speculative eyes. They are trying to see what good is in it, for them; whether good can be there at all, since benefits are forbidden, such as leisure and a garden, while orders for the destruction of home and hope must be obeyed; whether there is anything in the dread that society is moonstruck, and is busily and solemnly rending the sanctions for its continuance.



Rumours of these doubts in the populace have been familiar to the high and mighty since Moses; a rumbling in the distance heard by a man having power over many, which he may ignore for a time, superior as he is to the muttering of the low multitude in the back-country of his governance. Yet these questions, arising from men's irrepressible curiosity, at last become articulate and loud. We may hear a voice presently in a volume to overpower the guns. A cannon without a crew behind it is useless; moreover, a cannon can point in any direction.

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For though a great man of destiny chooses his path to greater triumphs, yet he never knows where his choice will bring him out, because—so we are told—"God directeth his steps." However that may be—you may phrase the matter as you please—his path never yet has led to what pride in its power had ordained. From out of the unseen, from somewhere, and somehow, another ordination works, and his path comes to a rum end. As life and mystery are one, and always will be, it seems to me better in every way to assume that human existence is purposive, and not the survival, so far, of industrious but aimless polyps. Some people, perhaps most simple folk, will always find the idea repugnant that love and pity are but chance issues of the blood, and like disease and old bones, must pass to the discard, without increase. I say those simple folk are everlastingly right. If they are wrong, then whatever we may feel because Hitler buried Rotterdam's unsuspecting folk under their own bricks and coping-stones one summer's day, and set fire to the mass, that the flames and stench should terrify others, yet the nature of his act would be no better and no worse than Herod's with the other innocents; no different in nature from storms which flatten harvests. We are not going to have that, for if we accepted it, then not only would democracy be dead, but better dead, because idiotic. But in adversity Man will continue to declare, "Though the gods be against me, I will rise

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superior to the gods." It is better to be a glorious fool, whose high hope is ridiculous under the purposeless stars, than as the swine.



In the meantime, most Londoners have not slept in their beds since August last. Many of them have lost home and bed. They snatch food and baths between warnings. And that is only the capital. There are other cities. I would not raise jealousy between British communities over the comparative intensity of their woes. For instance, how would one like to reside in the pleasant town of Dover? It is now called Hell Fire Corner. Bristol, which had an association with Maryland before Washington was born, has been cruelly used; and Southampton, from which the *Mayflower* sailed; and Liverpool and Birmingham. The burial of the dead after one raid by night on Coventry occupied much of a week, and incidentally that city lost its cathedral, a right example of a Gothic that was England's own, the Perpendicular. A Nazi in his teens roving the night, not sure of his whereabouts, but anxious to drop his load and get home, who knows nothing of history before 1933, and cares nothing, and nothing of the spirit except Hitler's, and wants to know no more, blasts to dust the best the centuries have given us. In the mail after the Coventry night there was a letter to tell me that a young relative, who lost her home in a London raid, has now

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lost her husband at sea; and an admirable master-mariner he was. Folk in America should allow us some latitude. The news of the day is apt to confuse our philosophy, and give it considerable heat. Mussolini, for another fact we must look at, has proclaimed that his flying Fascists have been bombing London, though we know his little lot was shot down before it reached our coast. Still, his words raise another problem for us. Bomb Rome?



What, bomb the Holy City? Well, is not Athens with its Acropolis older than Rome, and holier, too, for many of us? Mussolini has dropped bombs into Athens, and elsewhere into Arcadia, Phocis and Attica. Do you know of Patras or Achaia? It gives you its own wine, after your first sight of Ithaca, before you continue up the Gulf of Corinth to Delphi and Mount Helicon. Mussolini blew holes in it before its people were aware he was at war with them. What had they done to him? Nothing whatever, being too weak. For that matter, he is the man for any murder should he guess it might profit him. He declared war on us from Rome, though the British Premier and Lord Halifax together went to pay him their misdirected respects only six months before Hitler began to kill off the Poles. He declared war on us, and not we on him, and his periods would swell into a paean, if he heard that London was cinders, though he

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knows the British hated the idea of striking at Italy. We always have had a tender feeling for Italy and its people ; and in war a tender regard for an enemy is hampering, and a help to your destruction.



Just here, since Rome and Athens come into it, let us note another fact, a most strange and oppressive fact. Everybody has heard that the Italian battle-fleet was sought at its moorings, and sunk by a winged weapon not yet in full plumage—and warships, we know, can protect themselves. The meaning of this is that man's best efforts, from the Parthenon to St. Peter's in Rome, and Canterbury's towers, as well as the Capitol in Washington, and all they stand for, are at the mercy today of that latest piece of human ingenuity, the aeroplane ; and outlaws are about, able to fly anywhere. Had we not better give thought to it, and soon ? That important question is but one of many which arise as you listen at night to the throbbing of a German bomber on his way, aware, as in your good fortune you hear him farther off, that there are others, your neighbours, alive that moment but anxious, who will see no morning sun.



Many riddles beset you, during the night-watch in London and elsewhere. All the hours of the dark are yours for a watch. Plenty of time for wondering ! Our

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friends in America are distressed by the reports of battle and its ruin of good. Yes, and it is a horror, abiding with us, and a near scrutiny of all it brings about needs fortitude. But do they quite realize that, so long after the founding of Athens, Rome, Massilia, Cadiz, Cordova and Paris, and of hundreds of communities which grew in pleasant places and formed the first schools of philosophy, medicine and law, and guilds of craftsmen, it has come about a recent clever device, the explosive engine, has loosed the bonds of civility, which we had supposed had taken on the nature of the enduring hills? All is adrift again. Noah's flood was nothing to it. Our marvellous piece of mechanism has turned the peoples of Europe into nomads once more. That engine may be good, but the devil, or a power of his kind, is driving it. Europe goes back past all its achievements to the dread and vagrancy of the sixth century, when law had gone, and the predatory tribes were overflowing; I won't say back to the Stone Age, for it seems that in those days a man had a fair chance of raising annual corn for a family without molestation. Anyhow, those early peoples knew of nothing better, and we do. We are weary of this blasting never-ending tramp of armed ignorance, especially as its bayonets now assist, by Hitler's orders, the migration of millions of males from one region to another, serfs in his new order. Amity showed itself when men first came together to

experiment with the crafts, and at last made the cathedral of Chartres, as a sign ; but now the conquering engines are parked about Chartres. That is where we are. To have known morning light, and the form of what was good, and then to sit as now we must in night absolute, when nothing is sure, except that two thousand years of building up are coming down, needs a stout heart for keeping alight a private lamp, in case it may be wanted.

We are back in the wilderness. That is the centre of this affair. We are back in the wilderness, and whether for forty years, or less, or for ever, depends more on what America thinks and does than perhaps America cares to acknowledge. Instinctively we turn from the regard of a truth which not only astounds but challenges all our desires, and our preconceptions of reality. Can the reality be dissolution ? We had better be frank about it. It can be. These days have been called glorious. Glorious they are when, dreading the worst will happen, one has seen aloft some of the few thousand young men going east to halt the oncoming hordes of destroyers, winged this time ; and who did halt them. There has been nothing like it since Thermopylae. We have now, thanks to them, another chance. But the days are not glorious. The captain of the armed merchantman *Jervis Bay*, when his convoy is attacked by a battleship, stands towards him and holds him off, that his charges may get clear ; but his ship

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goes down, her guns still firing while her gunners work in water. We have such men. Nevertheless, the days are not glorious. They are evil. They cruelly expose human folly, wickedness, and ineptitude, and treachery where the trusting multitude never expected to see it.

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There is a legend which relates that once upon a time a strange star appeared over a hamlet of no importance, and some watchers, no more worthy of notice than shepherds, heard a word or two out of nothing, telling them not to fear, for this bright visitation meant, to men of good will, peace on earth. We need not believe this unless we want to, but whether or not shepherds ever saw a star without a name, and heard a message of peace unfamiliar to the lowly, it is certain there was a babe about then, for later, a man appeared, who threw a light entirely new on the laws and the prophets. His astonished listeners most likely misunderstood him often enough; adoration is liable to err; mistakes were sure to arise out of the teaching of one whose mind moved in a dimension apart from common experience. But the spirit of his way of life is as verifiable as sunlight. It can be rejected, and it is, by nations insisting on their sovereign rights, and by all systems of politics and economics officially sanctioned, for it does nothing to justify authority in the control of our goings and comings. Yet, because that ancient story has solaced men of all

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sorts and conditions with the hope of a fuller life, it has been established by at least the decoration of the arts, and the solemnity of a variety of ritual. For twenty centuries it has been a promise of gladness in a better way of living.



Is that hope of fellowship to be put out, the last gleam? Yes, even that, which is all that is left to us now. We hear that the Hollanders, as one of war's jokes in uniform, had to submit their Christmas cards to Dr. Goebbels's officers. Why has that robin got a red breast? What does that mistletoe mean? We had better laugh where we can, because there is nothing funny in the news, except to men of ill-will, that Christian priests are under duress in most of Europe; their prayers have to satisfy the police as well as God. As you may remark, they are getting only what they deserve, since they have always provided another crucifixion whenever secular authority desired to assert rights superior to an accepted moral order. So they have, yet the altar has kept an original validity, and before it men have given homage to a thought above good and evil. If the Church has been dark and empty, there could be a candle in the sanctuary for anyone who chose to light it.



Though warfare can be Christian no more than black can be white, this war is the first among

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Europeans in which the aggressor has avowed his purpose to subvert the moral sense on which our law rests, and to enforce on us a new gospel. St. John's, we must suppose, is useless, in an age of motor spirit. Troubled mankind throughout the ages have looked for a Messiah and an evangel, and the strangest of these apparitions takes our eyes. No celestial portent marked this advent. No angelic choir touched harps of gold above man at war with man to herald peace on earth. Nothing like that. There was no star, but a meteor; a dive-bomber. No manger in a stable, with tranquil creatures about sure that all was well; a thundering armoured-car instead, and a furious redeemer, behind him the smoke and flames of the cities through which he had passed. There can be no question of his nature; he gives no blessing, but shouts "War is the most natural, the most everyday matter. War is eternal, and war is life." He has not come to fulfil, but to destroy.



A respected English critic of letters, who is a Churchman and a man of peace, recently declared bitterly that only old men would call this a war against anti-Christ; he was sure no young man would call it that. So am I. Young people, and it is one of their virtues, are embarrassed by the grandiose, which is bald, usually. None but fools who have disregarded the obvious trend in the

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past twenty years of the world's affairs would give this war such a name. Still, would our critic call the acts of the Nazis the acts of the apostles? Are they pro-Jesus? War is an obscene assault on the mind; we have long known that. But this new evangel would establish the outrage in perpetuity, our earth to be a pasture of hate burning. Ercebus for Helicon. Hitler was implored by many peaceful men having authority not to begin bloodshed, for we had learned what that meant, and not so long ago; he himself had seen it. Let us reason together! But the path he had prescribed for Germany was not in reason; only tanks could make it. He had to be deaf to appeal. Yet his guns, he promised, would not fire if we submitted to him, and gave up our arms, while he kept his. As only German rights existed, there was nothing for reason to do. But the sons of Adam never remove their fences and landmarks, and part with the things they have made, if they think there is a chance of keeping them; and when, beyond their goods and chattels, they are told their souls are of no importance, and must be of a uniform cast, like dirt, from now on, then many of them prefer death to the survival in mechanical acts of men worse than dead. We dare not be Miltonic, and speak of anti-Christ; we know most sorrowfully that only the innocents are dying while their fathers are in bonds. Nevertheless, it does happen that young men must be either martyrs or soldiers. They

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have no other choice. Though how we would love to see the sky as it used to be, its horror gone for ever !



When will it go ? Will the defeat of Hitler bring out the sun, and all be clear again ? You ponder that, as the night passes. Are not the resources of civilization already scattered ? Even health services must be extemporized in ancient cities for emergencies amid wreckage. Peril does not end with the explosions. Doctors are fearful, since unaccustomed humanity is exposed to the raw elements in a continuous extension of pollution. Children must do without schools, and students without libraries. One London school and its library, well known to American scholars, because it is unique, has been closed ; that it is a universal repository of all the evidence the social sciences possess is significant. Its librarian, who sleeps in a near cellar while overlooking the end of the dispersal for safety of his precious collection, that accumulation of many years of research and patient ordering, looked sternly at me while displaying vacancy where knowledge used to be systematically arrayed. He made no sage comment, though he is a doctor of letters, versed in the humanities. All he said was, "Blast Hitler."



Our black-out is haunted by many doubts, problems, questions, desires. Though the lights are dim or out in

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Europe, verities of the spirit remain. For that reason you may find any evidence you look for, because the actualities of war, even victory, can be as deceptive in their outcome as the waywardness of statecraft which dictates our ways and means, or the rebel minds that resist. Movements of armies, invasions by aircraft, excursions of dictators and diplomats, though they give shape to strategy, yet the shape is only provisional. There can be no finality in material conquest while the moods of men and women are changeable. Cities are ruined, universities shut, fruitful industry has ceased, factories are ash and rubble, and transport is disrupted; there is consternation when a weight of armed men appears suddenly in another region, harvests rot because the hands to gather them are absent, people sicken in areas that have been harassed too much; oil tanks burn, tonnage sinks, money is spent; and over devastation, far in the background, loom the spectres of famine and revolt.



A Communist turns to me, as the talk goes on, and remarks that the war should be stopped and a revolution begun. One does not answer that. It does not seem helpful to plan a new life as a sequel to suicide. Another man, a pacifist, shocked by the massacre, is for peace, no matter how it comes; only peace. One can see no hope in that. We know sadly what the Nazis have done to

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others, after a promise of peace. Young Czechs are still being shot, for daring to remember their dead. The Hollanders and the Belgians were promised peace, and awoke one morning to find all their movables pouring in wreckage to the sea. Their lands had been up-ended. We have been told that wrong is what harms Germany, and that right is anything to her advantage. So where is peace? We should rejoice to hear that word; and when for a spell the night is not shaken by the guns, in the silence we feel we would give anything to know we should never hear that sound again; the boom of guns is dismal to the spirit; it gives a grue. But what must we give for peace? We do not know, and cannot learn. Hitler's armoured divisions, meanwhile, are somewhere near the ports they won on the North Sea and the English Channel. They have said nothing of peace in the war they began.



Londoners groping to their duties in a black-out, or working desperately by the glare of buildings alight, correcting tangles of tram cables, telephone wires and fire hose, patching the roof of a gasometer which has an unexploded bomb in its belly, stopping the floods of broken water-mains while the blasts continue, entering a furnace in the hope of saving people entrapped, and worse tasks, better not described, these men know there can be no recompense. No recompense at all. They are

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but salving the remains of a world which has passed; something with which to start another. Mothers awake at night in a subterranean corridor, a cosmopolitan sleeping place for thousands, watching their children uneasy on railway platforms, whose fathers are in the army, or afloat, or above somewhere, putting out flames, would like to be told not only when they may begin life anew, but how and where. Nobody can tell them. They are not aware, not yet, that the sanctions which kept a continent in being are all broken; and that to establish populations on the land again, and in the factories, willing to work, other sanctions must be discovered on which to base a social life which the poisons of jealousy, pride, privilege and injustice cannot corrupt. Where there is inequity there is no fellowship; and fellowship is life, and lack of it is death. We are coming down to first things. This wreckage some day will be cleared, and we will begin anew.

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There will be renaissance. The wind is rising. The knowledge of what we ought to do is at hand, and the spirit which must breathe life into it is the sense of comradeship in a common cause. This war is itself a revolt against mechanicalism and the regimentation it exacts. Men hate it, in their hearts. It was the dominant machines which fashioned the kind of world in which Hitler's growth into a universal nightmare was inevitable.

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Let us not waste time searching for the blameworthy. We and our ordinary goings-on must bear our share of the blame. Hitler designed the succession of deafening crises out of which the war came, but he was no more a matter of chance than seed-time and harvest. There was the grain, and nurturing, and now we have the crop. The origins of this war survived the last shot of 1918. All Europe kept to its old opinions and devices. So did America. Our political, economic and social histories from 1918 will hardly bear scrutiny by a sensitive student. And the world is never better than the expression of its common impulsions. We need not contemplate a mystery. As we are, so are our cities and our prospects. There can be nothing better about us till we have the light and the will to shape a reality more comely under the sun.



The immutable laws, which govern the stars, work apart from our clever policies and aims. We may attempt by subtle play to outwit them, but the consequence of falsities is as inevitable as disease out of dirt. The Galaxy has to obey, and attempts by men to escape from the same control must end in calamity. If we discover ways to harness elemental powers, and then use these released new forces for personal profit, outside a moral order, we shall suffer the fate of Prometheus. That is why western civilization is in anguish now. We

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shall continue to suffer, and to suffer after this war which has us in chains, unless our experience teaches us the right use of knowledge, and the need of communion. A fairer time will be at hand, as certainly, when we want it seriously enough to work and pray for it in humility and understanding.

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How remarkable it is, the help of the poets, when there is no other help! Cities are in ruins, and the abominable threatens, but the word is still with us. Poetry, the realists tell us, is for solace. It is a pleasant way of escape. It is aside from the facts of life. This nonsense is still repeated, though the truth is that when a civilization goes the way of all flesh its energy survives in its books, art, science and architecture. If men would but look there, and cease to despair because what was false in society has come to its own, they would know what was possible in the variety of life's great adventure. We see what could be made of our earth, if we willed it. I turned to Traherne the other night, while the sounds of reality were those of Tophet. Our policies and our economics will never come to anything but what they deserve, and we see what that is, till we turn to the right way of escape. Traherne told me, "You will never enjoy the world aright, till you so love the beauty of enjoying it, that you are covetous and earnest to persuade others to enjoy it. And so perfectly hate the abominable corrup-

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tion of men in despising it, that you had rather suffer the flames of Hell than willingly be guilty of their error." It begins to look as if we must believe something in earnest, at last.

March 1941

SHIPS AND THE SEA

March 1941: Between its headlands, the crescent of the bay is pale and still in a winter calm. Those headlands used to be as familiar as the porch of home, but today the scene is peculiar. I don't know it, and I don't like it. Not a sail is out there, not a touch of smoke. The high coast beyond fades into haze in both directions, the ghost of its renown. Its substance has gone. In this light, under a sky which has lowered and left the glad sun behind it heaven knows where, you could imagine England to be in the twilight of its age. The bay, the coast, the outer, suggest cessation and obsolescence. Those promontories have stood aloft to watch the traffic of the English increase as the ships passed through the centuries. The pioneers of America passed them, when voyaging to a new world. But now, by the look of them, they have no more to watch, and have receded to a memory which is growing faint. I had to assure

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myself, eyeing faint landmarks, that this was the scene I knew. Not even its kittiwakes were about.

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Down below that certainly was the beach where the children used to make holiday. It is waiting for another game to be played now, and Leviathan himself would be in a fix to move a foot on it. I think he would perish there. Those waters, once so lively with traffic, appear to have retired into the obscurity of the time when, so the tale goes, only the Phoenicians visited us, and we ourselves never ventured out. Nothing is in the grey offing, nor likely to be, you could suppose. A spell is over it all. Once, as I watched, there was an intrusion on the waters, but the weird was not broken. A black motor-boat skimmed across the expanse, as irrelevant as a water-beetle on the Styx. That small object melted in the haze, which could have been its only purpose, in a day when mirage and concealment had changed familiar contours, recognizable now only as a face under its shroud.

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Then the spell was broken. A ship did loom, and she stood in. She was large and leisurely, and sure of herself. Here came substance at last. A shape approached from seaward that you could hear as well as see. The distant call of a boatswain's pipe was as if the past were nearing the land, to wake us with a reminder of continuance. A

company of men was arriving this day out of the bygone to make a hitch on the present hour. That grey cruiser was in no hurry, and moved in as if the bay belonged to her. Her ensign was slack and unostentatious, but her character was not in doubt. Her pose was as if she knew all about it, if we did not, and that if we were unable to see into the obscurity she would tell us nothing. If a watcher did not know what her presence and leisurely bearing implied, that was his affair. She approached from the direction of our enemy. He, we know, is straight across, and not so far away.



A few of us stood to remark her. We stopped for some minutes, and then went about what we were doing. Most of the people that afternoon in the main street of the town, which is dangerously open to the sea and the unpredictable, gave her no attention. Perhaps they were unimpressed, knowing well enough they could get on with their business, such ships as that being usual, and never out of hail. That notion may have been their support, yet I doubt it. The women at the greengrocer's were selecting wares, their backs to the sea, and the shopkeeper was scooping up potatoes. A naval captain, with his arm in a sling, was unseen by them as he walked past. He was one of but three seamen I saw in the busy place. A newsboy on the kerb was handing out the local afternoon paper as fast as he could to people streaming

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into the cinema to see *The Great Dictator*. He was chanting in a low voice—there was no need to cry out with the crowd so close—"Benghazi, fall of Benghazi." I bought a paper myself, for I disbelieved the boy. It would be another week before our men in Libya could reach Benghazi; and then, like every other buyer, I obstructed my neighbours with an eager opening of the paper on the spot. That patch of the street was conspicuous with white banners. And there it was. The boy was right. "Mussolini's gone to the mat again," I heard a man say to his wife, as he took tickets for Charlie Chaplin's film.



But what, you may ask, has Benghazi in Africa to do with a cruiser you saw off a British harbour? Well, what has the moon to do with the tides? And what has the sea to do with commerce? It is easy for a farmer in England, wise about the soil, to succeed while innocent of the power which gives freedom to his plough. Not many Londoners could say where their docks are, except vaguely, and would not know a barquentine from a bollard. They accept as natural the pigeons in Trafalgar Square, but the sea-birds about the Thames bridges surprise them. They are unaware that except for our liberty on the outer waters London's chimneys would cease to smoke. A broadcaster tonight, for example, when advising us about our reading, in days when we

should be learning the meaning of maritime affairs, said the best book about the sea is something or other by what's his name. Perhaps it is, for I haven't read it, but I fancy the broadcaster was misinformed. Where ships and the sea are concerned, the usual commentator is not in his element. The best book of the sea in English had its origin in a yarn about a whale, a yarn current in New England so many years before Melville departed on a momentous voyage that Emerson records it in an early diary. It was Mahan, also an American, who wrote a book which made clearer in the wardrooms of British ships of war the meaning of sea-power. Melville's book was nearly forgotten for seventy years; and who but students know of Mahan?



The British have been called a sea-faring nation. They are not. The majority of us know little more of maritime affairs than American farmers in the Middle West. Probably our instinct in the matter was more sensitive in the eighteenth century, before we were so absorbed in factories and machinery. I think it would be fair to call the Norwegians a sea-faring people, and there was a period when South Sea islanders were as much at home over the deep as on land, but it would be hard to name others. Until the coming of railways, relatively few of the English ever saw their own shores. When Charles

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Lamb took a trip down Thames to Margate he exclaimed,
"Is that the sea? Is that all?"



That is all most of us know. Spacious as it is, the deep is not easily seen. Now and again readers in America, as in England, are attracted to a piece of tasty fiction about a ship and her men, but usually it is a book sailors do not want. They know better. Even Mussolini, now a statesman, who used to read political economy to such a length that he had trouble with the police, recently sent great armies overseas to several regions of Africa, regions separated both geographically and by foes, and then kept his battle fleet to its home ports. Had he never heard of Napoleon in Egypt, when Nelson interposed off the Nile, and what happened in consequence to a French army on its way to the conquest of the Orient? As for Hitler, immersed in mythology and astrology, he is only now beginning to discover that the surface of the earth is mainly of ocean, which requires of bold adventurers an amount of knowledge not to be gained in a week or two. It is certain he has never heard of Mahan, and so is unaware that scuttling a ship is but a hopeless gesture while dodging reality.



There is a stray fact, which only mariners have noticed, to show the difference between those bred in the old lore of the sea, and the others. Both Italians and Germans,

in this war and the last, have regarded a fighting ship as a proud man would his bright new villa. It is an acquisition, not to be lost. Its paint ought to be kept, if possible, free from marks. Both of them have always feared to lose a ship. A ship to them is a masterpiece to be proud of and to preserve. They see it better as a pawn in diplomacy than as a gun-platform. The newest Italian battleships, as examples of naval architecture and engineering science, really were masterpieces of high speed. But the value of high speed in a ship of the line is not to save her, but to bring her to action unannounced. A ship of war is built to be lost, if outfought; but the right seamen know, whatever the odds against them, how kind the gods may be to light-hearted audacity and cunning. It was an amateur British seaman, turning his sport to a warlike purpose, who took charge of a few men and a motor-boat, and scuppered at Dakar the most formidable of the French battleships, and made away safely; thus one threat to the security of our communications, at a juncture when events were hard against us, was removed without even the light of the moon. But you must have handled craft for the fun of it in ugly places after dark with the tide against you to go on such excursions. The instinct to the best move at sea prompts only those taught by experience that in peril they may risk all if they trust to the heart. There was more in Captain Marryat's novels—as a boy he served with

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Cochrane—to show Hitler what force was likely to appear, once he uttered the word, than in all the calculations of his party leaders. He was, on that fateful day, playing the sorcerer with the springs of life.



Napoleon said that God is on the side of the big battalions, but he found too late that this seems to be so only as far as a day not in the almanac. There are odd signs to warn us that Napoleon's acknowledgment of an unknown directive power was just; that mind does pervade the universe, and a creative energy beyond our measuring can be both helpful to us or otherwise; yet his faith that this power favours mastodons and monsters, and ignores simple well-doers who would keep bright the light man has won, is against the facts in earth's story. His was the error which often confounds self-seeking, and causes the mighty to be put down from their seats, unless they show more sense than the high and mighty usually do. Strange, that the humble and meek should have had such a long innings! You might venture to suppose that despite wars, revolutions, famines and other consequences of the faulty management of human affairs, friendly persons are in the right line, and move with a universal stream of beneficent tendency.



A ruler, judging shrewdly by appearances, which is called real politics, considers the time ripe for it, and

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upsets the world with calculated forces. He makes a philosophy to serve his purpose, and his armies begin to thunder. All will be well for him, for all is measured. His confidence that the greater weight of things is on his side gives him the sense of glory proper to might and magnitude. He is godlike; and overlooking the hordes of petty mortals from a height, he gets no warning to stand from under. No warning at all. Nobody else knew what was coming, for that matter. But there is a reserve of knowledge, seldom called upon in ordinary life, and latencies in the spirit of man never evoked except by calamity or religion, and perchance they arise together. Then, out of the conqueror's auspicious sky, and across his open road to celebration, hindrance springs, of unaccountable origin and power. Attributes oppose him of which the books told him nothing.



Who in England, however wise, could have calculated on what happened at Dunkirk? No measuring for that was possible. Not so much as a hint showed of what was latent. Yet the power to perform that saving task was always about, in the common scene, and it took shape at a call. The overwhelming engines had driven our army down to the French shore. What could save it? Now, although the British are not a sea-faring nation, for most of us look to ships and the sea as often as we dip into the *Nautical Almanac*, yet we have a surprising

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number of people whose fun is in small craft about the coast, and who will even venture into solitude when the wind is rising. They can read the clouds and the signs on the flood. There is native on our shores, which can be risky, and are long relative to our acres, an amphibious population, professional and amateur, not included in our national statistics. You cannot state in numbers the amount of an inarticulate liking for the behaviour of a little ship. They express their individuality, these people, in escape from our society, when they can make it. And how it happened we have yet to learn, but on a day a word went round, and they were on their way over to Dunkirk. The davits of liners in the docks of London were left empty. Let us note, however, that the great liners themselves could not be present at that astonishing scene. No room! It was a flotilla of a variety of small craft, manned by enthusiasts, which brought our army home.

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That uprising of hidden strength to save was a miracle to us; it was out of nowhere. We were as astonished as if the Channel waters had been piled up to let our troops go over. We are so used to moving to the orders of necessity, which issue from officials, that it is forgotten independent eyes may be watching unseen, that spirit may abide in stillness, waiting a more propitious season. We have forgotten that life is an unfolding purpose and

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not a frustration to be suffered, for the deadening mechanicalism of material science has had its way with us. We move without question, and without much feeling, to the drive of wheels governed by formulas and dictates. Reverie in vagrancy, with the towers in view of a fairer time not come, went with faith and hope, under the glare of spot-lights. We are changed.

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The change did not come in the twinkling of an eye, by the blast of a trumpet, or we might have noticed the difference. And the change is not simply that property and profit are put above the value of free life, for that has been so since field could be added to field and usury was denounced by the earliest moralists. What has happened is far worse than that gain is society's first thought, and not welfare. Our damning guilt is that we have become contemptuous of life. The chief part of it we call, very casually, man-power, and its value is not kinship, but its docility in applying itself in the gross to apparatus. So our sense of form and beauty is lost. Personality is gone. Life is not to us what it was to the Greeks, and to Christ. Consider the lilies of the field? Why? What is a lily when stream-lined necessity compels the million? Merely a trivial object of sentimental poetry. Shelley made a song about a skylark, but nothing would be said today should the last bird be rendered, if its fat had a special virtue for the easier working of delicate cylinders.

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Our engines are driving us to destroy life everywhere, to our supposed advantage, and we notice something is wrong only when the dust-storms of earth's increasingly desiccated surface put a stop to some profit-making, to say nothing of ensuing destitution and starvation. We are punished, but we are as unaware of the cause of desolation as the companions of the Ancient Mariner. The finer values are degraded and lost, and we are changed.



Religion and the arts are the best reflections of what we are, and it is there that the change is most plainly seen ; but statesmen do not often look to the altar and the arts for signs of the times. It is not much use doing that, since a moral order has no application in politics when life is contemptible. We have come to a day when the gift of reason itself is changed into a curse. Haven't you noticed that, even in our new fiction ? Its outlook is most acceptable when it mocks the spirit of bounty, the lyrical mood. Hardness and cruelty distinguish it. It exhibits the squalor of existence, for our delight, as the daily spectacle, and the whole of truth. In the best of it, the wonder of life is but the glitter of a complexity of predestinate metallic rods working out nothing ; which is nihilism. It is the steely reflection of mechanicalism.

After a century of improvements on nature, with a consequence so deep and wide that we have lost sight of

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the earth, and have forgotten it is somewhere under foot, consider our cities ! They are toppling, we don't know why. What essential virtue was lacking from our many inventions, that industrial society now feels its foundation stones shaky ? Perhaps no more than honesty. While the machinery of state and industry continued to revolve, and all seemed well, falsity and ignorance, even in the government of nations, was looked at appreciatively or cynically, and dismissed with yesterday's political items. To throw sand into gearing we have polished is an obvious crime, but to corrupt human affairs with falsities, and disregard the balance which planets must keep, are venial, and have been said to pay. Payment, at present, seems deferred.



Today we are showing a sincere interest, and even anxiety, to learn where it was we blundered, so it is worth noting that seamen are still simple, quick and direct, when tackling changes in circumstance. They have to be. They dare not forget the sea, which is harsh with sophism. It was not done by precedent at Dunkirk, nor by legal quibbling, but by native heart and wit in independent action with facts as they were. Sailors of course live apart from us, and are infants among cleverly adulterated minds, but they use the stars for guidance, and accept the elements as we do newspapers. It is not good for seamen to wait till the sea warns with headlines

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screaming calamity; they have to know, within a little, what to expect, and how to meet it. When they sort evidence, to learn their whereabouts, seamen must be nearly right in judgment, or they may die. Responsibility for the lives of others they put on with their caps. No doubt it makes a difference in a man, when he must keep strictly to first things between the sky and the deep. Though today a seaman drives an enormous engine on the ocean, and may even allow its course to be kept by an automaton, yet he is not released from the lot of the earliest navigators.



What is his lot today in war? We can only guess. On the day the guns began, he was spirited away. He vanished, and no word came back. Not that we ashore speculate much about him. We seldom meet a sailor. We go on eating as usual, but we never ask where the stuff comes from. The ships do it, somehow, probably. It has happened that a merchant seaman, in his shore clothes, home for a few hours after vigilance has got a cargo in port, has been sternly asked the nature of his war effort. The British are a sea-faring nation, as the saying is, but our acquaintance with the sea amounts to little more than the old tale, that sailors are accustomed to drink and drowning. If we chance to know more than that, it is to explain that a seaman these times is a mechanic, though not in a garage or a factory; he uses

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spanners on plant afloat. Because he resembles the rest of the mob we rarely know him, when by chance we meet him.



What did interest us, of late years, was his engine, when it was large enough, and sufficiently unlike a ship, viewed from selected vantages, to be mistaken for a superior hotel. Our wonder, of course, has been for great ships. The bigger the better. When the half-gods go, and the gods at last follow them, we worship the stupendous, for that beats us. A machine of magnitude with an intricacy of parts is more to us than the laws and the prophets. It is true that without men to motive her, a vast and precious ship would be no better than elaborate rubbish, but we forget that. Even her captain and chief engineer may be omitted from mention. They are but ministrants to a new goddess. The efficient complication of her bowels is more of a wonder, deserving respect, than midnight stars and the foretokens of the seers. The revolutions of her engines dazzle the wisdom of the ages. The fineness of her gearing controls power enough to make a hurricane look silly, and nobody remembers that it was brought about by an elderly fellow in spectacles with a millimetre gauge; the truth about the goddess being simply that she would be as dead as a dump of bricks without breath put into her by an army of dextrous nobodies, most of them underpaid. For sea-power, first

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and last, resides in a sufficiency of the right men. Without them, and you had better haul down the flag, before it is pulled down.



We don't know these men. The departments and exactions of a mechanized world separate us. We are hidden from each other by our duties as specialists. Fellowship is lost in the maze of organization. Though the engine was made for man, and not man for the engine, a commonplace not worth mentioning, yet our behaviour belies it. Necessity gives first place to the established plant, and the drive of that rules our lives. But sea-power, which alone secures freedom to commerce from piratical interruption, cannot be kept automatically. That power resides in craftsmen with a long and tried tradition, and, if the integrity of the tradition is broken, so is the power; for the power is of spirit, and we might call that the will to independence. But how near to dissolution that tradition has been some of us have reason to know. There is evil at large today. Yet for two things in this war we may thank whatever gods there be; or the cherub aloft, or any invisible guardian high in glory allowed us by kind permission of the proper faculty. One is that, after the way they were forgotten at the end of the last war, the men whose vital service is with ships and cargoes bore us no ill-will. As the dreaded signal went up again, they saw it, and vanished, without

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a word. They are doing what they alone know how to do. And the other thing is that some signs of insurgence show at last against a destiny imposed by mechanicalism. The spirit of man, long subject to the bright objects of his own creation, is in revolt. Dunkirk was more of a rescue for us than we yet fully know. Well, let us hope it was, let us see it as that. For that affair at least suggests that good will and fellowship, taking heart and what means lie around, could win control of the power of perverted science now careering over the earth in anarchy, to the undoing, not only of civility, but of the value of life itself.



When a community lightly overlooks—if it notices the matter at all—an injustice to a body of its members, it will have to pay for it, sooner or later; though payment, we easily surmise, is exactly what the conscious part of the community wished to avoid. But pay it we must, one way or another. We hope of course that when institutions do wrong nobody is responsible, and punishment cannot follow. Such a mischance is much the same as wet weather; with that consoling thought the trouble goes. But does it? Suppose a wrong, though legal, and nobody to blame, breaks a law not in the national statutes? For the doing of wrong, though by inadvertence, may be grievous, an infection in the body politic, blighting good relations. This probability, though not discussed

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in orthodox political economy, may be, and I am sure is, as inexorable a regulation as gravity. Its outcome may be strange, and show hardly a sign of its origin. A difference has come into relations, and no reason clearly shows.



Not long before this war began I went to sea in a freighter. It was my first long voyage for some years; and how comfortable it was, that winter escape into bleak windy light, with the remembered sounds and smells, the midnight watch, the stars lurching, the need for a handhold, and the men about me again, out of the past, but the same as ever! I was soon undeceived. The men certainly were as I used to know them, except for one important difference, and the change alarmed me. That ship's company—until I had been in the ship two days every man of it was a stranger—was a familiar bunch, but I found the attitude of my messmates to their task was unusual. The tradition had suffered, in some way. They were ribald with the verities. They mocked the latest development, many house-flags but few owners, into which invention and finance had changed the merchant service. There was derision of the symbols and the ancient loyalties, sometimes hilarious, but occasionally bitter. Moreover, and it was a novelty to me at sea, my messmates attended with gravity to the uproar and confusion of all nations. Off the Tagus we picked up

word of a further Italian outrage and insult, which formed a gloomy cloud in the thoughts to add to the splendour of the sunset, which seemed unaware of what we had heard, and was untarnished. We had seven radio sets aboard, and so we lost nothing of folly. It was plain the daily broadcasts have made a difference at sea. Barnacle Bill is dead. Science killed him. He must have gone overside since I was last away. That means, for one thing, that the popular sea-story now relates to nothing on earth. The modern sailor is as difficult as a garage hand, and he is as well aware of what is going on in Town. When we are thinking of sea-power, this addition to knowledge must not be overlooked.

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I noticed our senior officers wore high decorations won in the last war, and never given except for outstanding adventure. One of them was a character, and as good a seaman and navigator as you are likely to meet; and a part of his war record is still used by official teachers when explaining to young sailors, who have never fought a ship at sea, how a seeming impossibility was once managed. But the talk of those seniors at table, though jolly in tone, was not encouraging for juniors, who sat at that table as apprentices. Anyhow, they depressed this deponent, who has known the merchant service all his life, and who, while he listened, knew in what measure England depended on the skill and resourceful-

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ness of such men as were eating with me. The irreverent tales of my messmates were undeniable, and the meaning of them was that man is only good enough to serve the machine. But in his heart man curses the monster, though he serves it well, after he has discovered its prosperity is considered above the worth of human welfare.



While listening to them, another war seemed upon us. Its outburst was so near, by every word that came through before the middle watch, that we were unsure that our ship could be turned round for home before the submarines were out on the prowl. That doubt, and the mood of the men, were unlucky omens.

What else could I expect from the men in that ship? There had been a great war, and they had been in it. Their service had fed the people at home and conveyed armies overseas. At last all was over. And then a man, who had commanded a ship, even in battle, was abandoned on the pavement. The machine did not want him any more. And if, as a one-time captain, you try to ship before the mast, that being better than nothing, it is better to button up your war decorations. Decorations are also a difficulty when, with your master-mariner's certificate in your pocket—you ought to have papers about you to prove you are not after the silver spoons—you peddle household goods, say brooms and brushes,

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from door to door in the suburbs. House-maids are suspicious. That is what happened to superior men after the last grand occasion. For such a reason, British merchant seamen were feeling as I found them when Hitler was putting the final touches to his preparations.



Then this war began. The lights went out. One lost touch with friends at sea as suddenly. They were out there, for we could continue to eat; but where were they? There was rarely a sign. I have seen, at night, the flash of guns, far out, playing like summer lightning on the horizon. That is all. No news. But it is certain our friends keep regular watch, as ever, for the shops are open, and the factories are very busy.



One night, listening at home to the news, the announcer mentioned a familiar name. It was that of the ship of my last voyage. One boat had been picked up. One only?

She had gone. Where were the other boats? Those ribald messmates of mine were in it again. Which of them had come through? The announcer had no more to tell me. I spent the rest of the evening looking at the wall, and wondering. I am still wondering.

April 1941

FROM AN OBSERVATION POST

April 1941: Spring came in a morning. The wind had been hard and black in the north without mercy, and the earth was iron, when not mud. Today the sun stopped the polar current, and in the release and cordiality of it a young corporal stood on the hill with me, to gaze over the bright Channel towards one of the Invasion Bases. This sense of growth in the air suggested work. With Lent comes offensives, but neither of us mentioned it. Instead, the corporal confessed shyly to being an architect, and while examining the young feathers sprouting from a grey elder stick, wondered whether his generation of artists, when our trial is past, will be free, in the dawn of a new era, to give their best to a country that will need some good work. "Though I'm speaking too soon," he added gravely. "I mean," he went on, "there is more than that fellow over there to deal with," and he indicated the southern horizon. "When we've pushed him out of it, only half the fight for freedom is over. We shall need more than guts for what will face us when the war is won. We won't go back to 1918. No, and we shan't feel like making many polite concessions to 1938."

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FROM AN OBSERVATION POST

He turned to me when he added that. I was by much his senior, which made me fear there was in his voice a note of reproach. I am of course of that older generation whose faith and works have done more than enough to bring youth to this dread passage. Should an intelligent conscript pretend to be a fool and unaware of it? Certainly were I in the corporal's ammunition boots I should know why I was wearing them, and have something to say, if not now, then in a more convenient season. Besides, speculation over what will follow the war is sure to arise in a pause of the raids and rumours. There are those, in quiet moments, who shudder with foreboding, fancying they hear already the sound of doom beyond the cries of victory, swelling indeed from out those very shouts of triumph. By doom they mean that their notions of leisure, comfort and security will get scant attention when society, like the deathless bird, is arising from its ashes. And there are those who dare to entertain the hope that out of the wreckage a commonwealth may be fashioned nearer to the heart's desire. They see men united, the poorer for folly, but richer with the experience, in a civility that ignores seas and frontiers and narrow sovereignties, a union of democracies not confused by many tongues and contrary motives, but enlightened and humbled by this catastrophe to their institutions, and resolved to have first things first, that the

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only planet mankind has got may be made the most of.

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You remember Whitman's "Where the Great City Stands"? We may call it only a poet's dream; but even blue prints for cities were dreams before the measurements were made. For we must dream, and when our time is rigorous and cruel, and promise is in the dust, that is when visions of what might be more often appear. Let young artists, who now are gunners, and riders in the sky, and navigators of ships amid mine-fields and torpedoes, when in the battery at night, and patrolling the clouds, and during the middle watch over the deep (and all's well, so far), remember the city not made with hands. We must dream, so let our dreaming be of light. This indubitable show of things, this present dark reality, the horror we must exorcize, though with our lives, what is it but the projection of the vagaries of hag-ridden dreamers? All that forms obdurate circumstance came of dreams. Once a man dreamed of a little engine to move more powerfully than others through internal combustion; and lo, our ghastly night sky, and the dead in the cellars! To a mind receptive of novelty came that revelation, and we welcomed it as a device to bring men nearer to each other; in truth, it happened that men could in reality mount up with wings as eagles, though borne aloft not by the power of the spirit which moved the

FROM AN OBSERVATION POST

prophet to chant of a joy to be. And the extraordinary outcome of this gift of wings? We are troglodytes again. We have gone to earth. We dread the light while fearing the dark. Human infants are born in subterranean passages, and stay there. We hear of children confined so much to the underground that they have forgotten to play and to smile. What an odd consequence of our power to get nearer the moon, that children should forget to play, and cannot laugh! Where is wisdom to be found? It does not seem to be in great knowledge, for our ingenious application of too much of that has brought us to a stage in progress when we are less free, and less happy, than the gorillas. The inherencies of clever things are never so obvious as their polish. No wonder we pine for immortality, and another chance, seeing what a tangle has come of the life we have, through the use of our gifts to graceless advantage.

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A need has arisen, I admitted to the architect, now a corporal, to dream anew, and somewhat better, and he had the chance of his life up there now, in his observation post, at midnight, while others sleep, if they can. I did not see the usual touch of cynical amusement in his answering smile, and that was something gained, like the touch of spring, for since the end of the last war too many promising young minds have been disillusioned, cruel and nihilistic. Perhaps my corporal was satisfied

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to find that his secret thought, which had gone beyond the battle smoke, could be shared by another, even an older man. He slung his rifle, and began to trudge uphill, but stopped and turned. "Did you hear Roosevelt this morning?"

I told him I was up for that. One must know what America has to say.

"Our fellows heard him. They sang afterwards, frying eggs. I say, the cheering in Washington, when the President went all out, did you notice it? It was worse than a raid, that noise. If my knees had been Ribbentrop's, I should have flopped."

*

I had noticed it. That urging sound, as though full tide were behind the President, bearing him on, broke on us like the billows of an invisible storm. But we heard it on this hill, not from Unter den Linden. The fact should be on the record. That Sunday morning, March 16, 1941, when we listened while the President of the United States announced that the hour had struck and America must assemble, was our first day of Spring. The night before had been troubled. The raiders had been coming in since dusk. Watching near midnight, we saw the sporadic barrage nearest to us converge to an immediate cluster of shell-bursts eager and fast at one point, and a bomber dropped to the rolling of thunder. What with such nights, and a polar wind, an earth showing no sign

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of change, and the invasion bases across the street, we have been kept only by inner resource. But it dawned on us, while listening, that Americans would not give their power to a cause merely to watch it sink halfway over. That would not be like them. They were with us. As the truth of this amplified through the void, there were women listening here who at first were dubious, for the result of too many shocks is to numb into resignation; but as they bent to the voice, and heard an American's generous tribute, given far away, to the valour of their humble neighbours, knowing it was just, though they had supposed sacrifices were lost, and to the quality of their husbands and sons, who may not see home again, they were in tears. Aid was at hand. We were not alone.

*

How genial was the new sun! And when perplexity and anxiety mingle with darkness to lengthen night, a magnanimous word brings the prime and heightens it. The morning air was warm and buoyant. The corporal had disappeared in the upper scrub. Nobody else was about, and nothing could be heard but viewless aeroplanes. I suppose you would have seen this stretch of deserted English coast as a corner of earth unlikely to be touched by emotion airborne from Maryland. As it is this day, so it was when its beacon was ready to be fired for the Armada. But as matter is mutually attractive, is

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not spirit? The right password will discover fellowship where all looked strange and contrary. A first glance along this shore might mislead you into turning away from what was haughty and aloof; too remote to know anything or care anything for what surmise and hope exists for future good. So let me tell you what I have learned of it. The reasons for an understanding with America are as grave as were the reasons for the quarrel and break in the long ago. Because a morning must come, and nobody knows how soon, when the explosions will cease. On that day, if most people over there, and most of us, freed from the shocks, believe the war is at an end, and that we may resume our ordinary occasions, and try to forget the past, we shall condemn to the everlasting dust-heap all that counts for good in two thousand years of history, and determine the future as a desert for wild asses and thistles. If, weary and thankful, hearing the signal to cease fire, we are merely grateful that death has passed by, victory will be the very shadow remaining over us of the destroyer. Anarchy will keep to the sky, where it is this day, and civilization will be doomed by its own judgment; our church spires will but point a cruel jest, and humanity—we had better say it—fall to the level of a multitude of vermin intent on its own extinction.

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The way to peace is the path of wisdom, and while

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men differ so strongly about wisdom, which is found but in good will, the causes of this world revolution will remain. Let us not forget that behind the conventional displays and alignments of military power, this war is civil war. It began as that in Russia, Italy, Germany and Spain, and its nature has not changed and will not change. It is better to call dangerous things by their first names, then we need not waste time trying to dismiss the subject. The rocky islands of the Mediterranean are overcrowded with liberal opinions abominated by Fascists, and there are great collections of simple honesty elsewhere in Europe, steadfast despite hunger, barbed wire, torture, prisons and fear of spies. When British forces took Mogadishu, a town remote on the Indian Ocean, the unusual energy of the white flags waved by Italian guards surprised them till our men found they were genuinely welcome, for an explosive mixture of 1500 political prisoners was clamped down near the citadel. If we do not enjoy the look of civil war—and who does?—yet it will not transmute itself because we name it ambiguously. It is not our delicate desire that is important, but the truth. France was not defeated by Hitler, but by greed, hate and lies within herself. In England too, for years, various sympathies disputing violently over the continental confusion gave the impression of a brilliant display of fireworks touched off by accident in several wrong places. As an instance, do you remember the

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blasting into dust of Guernica in Spain on a long ago market day there? A Catholic priest, who was at an altar in the town when it happened, testified to a correspondent of the *London Times* that the destroyers were German planes. He saw them. But Germany was not at war with Spaniards? She was not. We may venture to say today that Guernica was merely a rehearsal for Rotterdam. But shortly after the event I listened while a kindly and intelligent Englishman mildly explained that Guernica was either a fiction invented by Bolsheviks, or, if it ever had existence, then its own people destroyed it (and themselves also, presumably) to put Franco in the wrong. It had come to the point with us when the nature of an act, good or bad, depended on the politics of its doers. Our ideals and social aims were as furiously controversial as ever were those of the early fathers over the nature of divinity, and its revelation and ordinances.



The interest of mankind in divinity, however, is not what it was; fear of the Lord no longer bows heads in general before a glory not visible. That, perhaps, explains why our political wisdom, to say nothing of standards in the arts, is impaired so much by egotism. When we know our own power, why be humble? We know that man has been a political animal since he first understood kinship and could recognize his personal

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gear; and now that a holy name no longer moves him to passion and eloquence, and his energetic imagination must have an outlet, he finds that in material things and theories of ownership and management. He omits from these considerations, as some of us did from the Guernica affair, all ethical values. Political dogmatism has taken the place of dogmatic theology. Though heretics are not burned at the stake, there are firing squads, which are more expeditious. Infants are not now baptized and then clubbed to make sure their souls are preserved, but what is worse, in State schools the innocent brains of children, alive with curiosity and wonder, are taken out, and official punk is substituted. Can you name a crime nearer than that to what was once called the sin against the Holy Ghost?



News came one day to my country, just when our various sympathies were more heated than ever, that the Nazis had gone to Prague to loot it and manacle its people. But Prague had but recently bought peace of them, at the price of its means to defend itself? Yes; that is the reason why the Nazis went there. The Czechs had disarmed. In a new dispensation for society, words spoken in council may mean their opposites. Language is to deceive, not to enlighten. Lies, well aimed, may save cordite. That day we fell silent and looked at each other. No question about it at last.

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Hitler, advancing outwards from Germany, and welcomed in his approach by thanksgivers who saw in him what he said he was, an avatar come to subdue Bolshevik fiends, intended to collect Europe's wealth country by country. About one thing we could now agree with ease; he would not collect us. Destiny had cast us for another part. We did not want it, but it was ours. Until we had fulfilled it, attention to our own house must wait.



As to our desires for our own land, and its place in western culture, you may hear the gist of it about this very upland. That has witnessed the growth of civility since travellers, coming nobody knows how, brought oriental wares to the stone-age folk who lived up there on the ridge, a thousand years before the Romans arrived; and the pavements and coins of the Romans are frequent in this neighbourhood. Our labours are marked from rude beginnings in flint to the epic of *The Dynasts*. You cannot stand within Winchester's nave without seeing how spirit informs and transcends the work of men. If they call upon it, then the very stones ascend in praise; and maybe, if men do not so build, but work for their own apotheosis and profit, then comes war among them. Anyhow, a society was here before Rome had its forum. It is a mistake to suppose that Roman legionaries found in this country

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only untutored savages; at least, those savages knew how to turn out ornamental gold breast-plates for horses quite well, and had built Avebury and Stonehenge ages before their coming. The qualities out of which arose Paris, Washington and London, are of great antiquity, and their essential worth has been proved by all the vicissitudes of time and chance since we were informed by what came from Greece and Palestine.



This height of the English coast, where aloft we saw our corporal disappear, has a hollow—you cannot call it a valley, and it is not deep enough for a ravine—which cuts down from the lofty escarpment through gorse, bracken and hummocks of thyme, to the sea-marge. A little more than halfway in its descent it passes beside a hamlet, where cottages range loosely along a terrace of the slope, overlooking the Channel. The gully there is confused by village tracks, and its brook moves inconclusively till it finds a convenient course for the rest of its short journey down. That junction of human traffic and a stream is marsh in winter, and in summer is a wild of dry rock and spongy ground where water-mint replaces the thyme of the upper slopes; and there, for a surprise, the vegetation of this wind-swept steep takes its chance to become extravagant. The vines of traveller's-joy, honeysuckle and bryony, surmount and overhang

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dwarfed willow, privet, hawthorn and whitethorn, in a tropical riot. It is savage with spines and nettles.



A more massive tangle of barbs is about that corner today. An overgrowth is permanent of metallic lianas with rusty spikes. Avoid that corner at night, for the coils almost arch the path. What could be worse, sentries cannot well see who you are in twilight, and you may not hear their challenge. Postpone rambles on evenings in spring to another year. Indoors is the right place, when black-out hour comes. Only the other day a local bull, ignorant of our ways of making war, went roving and challenging. He charged over prepared and forbidden ground, and what was left of him was found at a remarkable distance. When he took flight, we all heard him go. We have pondered the vast hole he left in this hill. Keep home, after dark. It is unhelpful to go out and watch any affairs the sounds of which you hear. The sky, with both fixed and wandering lights of many colours and degrees of intensity, is an enigma, past unravelling. Our nights are the worst of it. You feel lucky and thankful every morning, when light comes again.



Up above us this spring forenoon, just under the ridge of the upland—the odd shapes you see along the skyline are remnants of prehistoric earthworks—is an observation

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post of the new Army of Britain. If you do not know its bearings you cannot find it. Our corporal was making his way to it. It is a cavity furnished with bunks, boxes and a stove. Steel helmets, gas-masks and other gear hang on its walls. Rifles are piled in a corner. It can be acrid with smoke, and driven rain—and how the rain drives here!—finds every chink, and makes more. I don't know what, on a first visit, when conducted through a maze of gorse, you would find in it of promise for my country. Little enough. The small company of young men there, dim in khaki and shadow, are shy and evasive till they know you; and each man resembles his fellow; khaki is a leveller, and personality seems absent. Around that hidden outpost the land appears abandoned. The tricks by which the troops in position hide themselves give even local folk the idea that our garrison is all a blind, or inconstant; or somehow puzzling. Puzzling it is, but to regard it as a blind can be dangerous, if lightly entertained. Hidden defences are without notice-boards, and allow no benefit to ignorance. I have had to witness war at its worst, so the discreet signs of trouble, before it breaks, are familiar, and I am well aware that this hill, which appears as placid as ever, is terrible. It is in visits to such a post, and to battery positions, and in long railway journeys, and on welcome occasions when soldiers knock at the door for many reasons, or for no reason but to come in and talk, that

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you learn this war resembles the last in little, and in its conflicting impulses not at all; that its fighting man is another fellow, not to be talked to as we did to his father; and that what we read about it leaves out most of what is waiting behind the demonstration of things as they are.

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When the Bastille fell in 1789 strongholds and ancient forbidding walls elsewhere began to topple, and for much the same reason that the walls of Jericho fell; the people shouted, and the battlements down came; at least they were loosened. The eyes of common men, bent to the usual clods and furrows, looked up to glad tidings; their bodies might continue under restraint, but their thoughts took the air and went to the distance. The earth renewed its youth after feudalism; it was good growing weather. The burning of the Reichstag in 1933 was as portentous, but hope was not released. Watchmen knew these flames signalled worse news than arson. Was it the right of men to meet in council together for the general good that was burning? Would the Bastille return? That glare over Germany shook the sky. After the long bitter experience of men, when their wills had been subject to satraps and tyrants, it was past belief that now, with their knowledge of freedom, they would meekly return to prison; but they submitted, and soon we saw those flames betokened more also, the breaking

of nations, of loyalties, of every sanction of liberty, even of worship. That fire signalled the subversion of our first and ultimate gain, that the mind should be its own, though the body were in bonds. This portent over Europe raised disquiet in important onlookers, somewhat later, who at first were indifferent, for the safe keeping of their treasure, thought to be proof against moth and rust. They feared for the ceremonies of urbanity, especially the ritual of its muniment rooms, its exchanges and markets. These, too, might dissolve, transient with the bulk of an insubstantial pageant? Now they begin to see it. In the hope of strengthening safeguards for privilege, they made the mistake of condoning the early behaviour of the Nazis, some of it past discussion, being revolting. The general outcome is not what they expected, but they must suffer it. Perhaps it needs more good heart to read cheerfully the writing on the wall than to endure philosophically a succession of bombing raids.

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We have good reason to know how disruptive of society is the tolerance of egoism, when honour has been confused with dishonour in the commonalty. It has been more dismal to watch the subservience of country after country—I ought to say government after government—to the cajolery and threats of the dictators, than to take the continuous German hammering. So when Mussolini ordered the Greeks to hand their land over to him, it was

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as cheering as wine in the desert to see them, for an answer, rise forthwith to measure themselves with Italy. Our hope was for the best ; but who would have looked for the return of the glory that was Greece ? Behold ! in a day it was shining. But the gallant spirit of so small a nation could not raise Europe to its feet, when the dead weight of it was too much for us. There we had to watch Vichy, commanding every Frenchman, for his own honour, to give a hand to his enemy in holding down France. If there is a figure to picture a fact so baffling, I don't know it. France, of all lands ! A little later we had to witness the politicians of Yugoslavia surrender their country to Hitler, as if it were a commodity too mean for a price, and he could do what he liked with what they did not want. Fear of the Nazis, and a motive lower than that, dread that the spirit of freedom should move their own people, made Ribbentrop's diplomatic art with Germany's neighbours as easy as gaming with poltroons, and the dice loaded. We felt, watching it all, that the Continent was under an unholy spell, and that the thunder of guns alone would never break its trance ; nor do I believe artillery alone ever will break it. The moribund body before it will rise must be quickened by a word not yet spoken.



A group of young soldiers, all of an age, merged by

battle-dress to one employ—though I knew that among them was an artist, an architect, a bank clerk whose delight in recondite modern verse warned me of what I have missed, and a timber merchant with a craftier understanding of politics than is needed for measuring boards—was in my house, and it was glum. The abjection of Yugoslavia grieved those men. They had expected the Serbians to be masculine. What could save her? What more could we do? Europe was cold and inanimate. Hitler trod at his ease over its body. They feared they would be in khaki till they were grey, unless the accursed spell was broken. But how break it? When would come the awakening cry? Thus they went on. They wanted hopeful counsel from an older man. But what did he know? It was as mysterious to him that manifest brutishness, perfidy and lies, could dominate so much of the earth for so long. It approached the unnatural. One could, I said, but hold on, and wait for daylight (or some words of that rare promise). It was, I told them (feeling anxiously pious), sure to come, though no man knew its time. (One ventures that kind of thing to younger men when they are troubled.) My friends, however, were not convinced. Perhaps they had suffered similar consolation before that day. Moodily they began to pick up accoutrements; they were off. I glanced at the clock. Wait, some news is due—never fail to hear the worst of it, when you

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feel bad! I went to the box, to relcase the latest bulletin.



The opening passage was blurred, and the soldiers were still easing their straps, when a voice rose loud and clear, and we looked at each other. "There has been a revolution in Yugoslavia, and the ministers who signed the pact yesterday in Vienna are under arrest."

Was this the hour? While we were benighted, could others see a break in the east? Nor did the shout those fellows raised come because they thought an ally was joining them in a hard contest. That was far from being the reason for it. The artist spoke. "So the people come out somewhere at last! France could end the war in a month now, if she tried." So she might. His remark brought a trifle of Whitman to mind. "Where fierce men and women pour forth as the sea to the whistle of death pours its sweeping and unript waves." But I did not utter it. Young men would have heard me. In some conditions of the air, Whitman is exciting. Still, on the instant, age felt as elated and youthful as the soldiers.



These men, volunteers and conscripts—they themselves make no distinction—in their conversation, in their letters, remain perplexed by the choice that has been forced on them. They had either to take a gun, or submit

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to a way of life alien and peculiar. They chose the gun. They had no love for the weapon, but they took it up with alacrity. Better that, than put up any longer with the hideous clangour across the water from Europe which for years had deafened common sense. They chose the gun, though the majority of them have been dubious of it as an argument; they have called it the last desperate corrective of the blunders of their fathers. They were children in the last war, or born after it, and since then the opinions and loyalties of their elders have touched them but lightly. This we ought to have expected. In war, the bounds of propriety everywhere go down, because the worst, for a period, becomes the best. It is not easy to re-establish propriety. When the standards of peace have been discarded as inconvenient in war, to clear the road for the guns, then morals, music, literature and art, all that is creative, as well as conventional politics, must be subordinate to the output of explosives. Another argument for living has been started, with a different order in logic.

The argument, however, was allowed to continue after the last shot, in 1918. The war was over, yet conventional legislators were ready, even eager, to continue as before, and this they did. But they did not bring healing to a distracted world, nor restoration for men returned from battle, nor hope for others, who had been too young for the trenches, but who then sought in

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society, which had been saved for their generation, the opportunities to pursue the arts of peace. Strangely, the earth, after suffering as a desert, did not blossom as the rose. What had been sinister remained in its body, which did not flourish. The green bay tree might have been the upas, for the homes were affected, as well as the legislature. In the home, the old loyalties were feeble in command, though Victorian disposition and polish, as if nothing had happened, were kept righteously free from dust. The traditional order was challenged at firesides. The faith of parents won scant ceremony. The younger folk were impatient, occasionally gay, with books, pictures and music that had seemed above the questioning of time. As to politics, they were derisive. Though seldom Communists or Fascists, they mortified their elders by looking fixedly, sometimes not without hope, in directions from which, by every sign, only more noise and wreckage could come. I have been told that the same domestic disparity has been observed in America. And this very day, across the cruel frontiers separating nations at war, cleavages run everywhere through the mind, disregarding seas, trenches and languages, to upset ingle-nooks in the remotest hamlets. Similar aspirations and resentments are alert throughout England, America, Europe, Asia and Africa. Within Germany and Austria fissure the same disruptive opinions. The steel and flames of the battle zones screen a reality that will not be

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scattered by tanks though they roll over it. It is as invulnerable as the air. It will survive untouched all the proclamations and decrees. Victory will not seal but release it. It is the resistless exploring curiosity of man, never satisfied with the imperfect, though aware that perfection is not for this earth.

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In their talks, these younger people seek to learn what it was in history that brought their hands to the triggers of guns and the wheels of ambulances. While still uncertain of the causes, they have become deadly on the trigger. The women who serve are as determined as the men. A girl near my home, flung from her telephone switchboard by a bomb which killed many in the building, retained her ear-phones, and half-stunned on the floor continued to send messages while the masonry went on falling. These are the people who keep their personal questions till the day is quieter. One of the soldiers of the observation post on the hill, while we gazed across the Channel, said to me, "I've lost my job, I've lost my home, I've lost my individuality. Talk of revolution! I've been revolutionized. You can't frighten me any more with that bogey. We've been bombed and conscripted out of our old lives, and we cannot go back to them, not if we would. But I don't want to go back. Something was wrong with it, or it would not have come to this. I'm not sure where my

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wife and child are from day to day. Dead or alive? We fellows are down to the elementals. The worst is separation. The odd thing about it, though, is that separation, in a dim corner of the mind, brings about idealism. We see pictures of another world, too far off for us to make out, for the sake of which we are going on like this. I've heard my father say in the last war, 'this must never happen again.' But here it is. Shall this happen again? Not if we can prevent it. We know more now than was known then, and one thing is certain. I say it will be no good turning swords into ploughshares unless we do it to feed the hungry, wherever they are, and not for what we can get out of it. I used to be a commercial traveller, and did pretty well, but after this I'll never try again to get the better of another man for profit."



I am not sure what, but for such hints, my friends see from their observation post on the hill, except the prospect plain to me, the waters of the Channel; and on those waters this minute a line of silhouettes, our ships, three miles out, smoke pouring from them in their extreme energy, and white fountains spouting near their sides. Bombs are falling out there, and the drab sky sparkles with the shells of the answering guns. But in the night watches on their hill, my friends seem to be listening for the reveille for rising and shining in a new day; and, even in this darkness, to "behold the land that

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is very far off." My own hope is kept by this ; for unless they see that land, it is not there.

May 1941

THE SWASTIKA OVER OLYMPUS

May 1941 : In the other great war, my unit for a period was quartered by the field of Agincourt. We could hear the guns rumbling about Ypres, yet the arrows of that battle of long ago could be heard faintly, if you paused in your business. It was confusing, if you tried to attend to both, for there was reality in each. In the principal room of the old chateau that housed us were some family portraits. One was of a girl, and she was noticeable, as her comeliness was touched with pride. Her downward disdainful glance was more pallid at night, by candlelight, when one passed her, as if she were mocking because she could hear with us the guns of 1917, the sullen guns, the ineluctable guns. One remembered, going up the stairs she had known, that she was guillotined at Arras, during the Revolution. Yet in war it can be disastrous to allow time and space to confuse you. A soldier must not only know the time of day, but project himself into the future, to forestall his enemy.

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The Nazis are now at Eleusis, and the fact that

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Aeschylus was born there is as irrelevant in war as that Hitler was not born there. One merely recalls that once before the Goths blotted out Eleusis, and then disappeared. There they are again. While the guns continue to boom it is helpful—but not to those who have to range the guns—to remember that cannon, too, are subject to time, and soldiers to the waywardness of the spirit of life, the confusion of victory and defeat. Beyond the spectacle of battle, we are dimly aware already of forces stirring in the world which will, some day, make triumphant rhetorical edicts, and expedient intrigues, no more important in retrospect than the pomposity of the late Kaiser William. One never knows what will come of the glorious occupation of a country. The very grass may grow up rebellious. The ancient extravagant fables, in which nature, still and silent, had odd possibilities, and shapes betokened more than was visible, probably have more in them than we suspected; they may be germinal with inherent wisdom. Too strict a devotion to science has shortened our vision. The consequence of sowing dragon's teeth seems to be as sure as that of early peas. However sceptical we may be of powers which cannot be weighed, measured and accounted, it is better to allow a margin for error; our error may prove greater, in time, than an immediate success with whatever element submitted to act to our advantage. How shall I put it? I have never seen a ghost, nor met a credible man

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who has, and do not expect to see one, but I don't know much.

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A dark weird impelling^{*} them, and flying abroad on machines like rocs and monsters, the war the Nazis spread on the air is worse than mere conquest; it is defiance of whatever power is Olympian. They appear over another seclusion of the planet, and scramble out of plywood contrivances called gliders, or float down from the bellies of aerial ferries called Junkers, and then begin to spray lead from automatic guns—those of them whose spines are not fractured—on Mount Ida.

Do you remember that Cronus, old Father Time himself, the father even of Zeus, used to be misty on that mountain of Crete? When the Nazis touch ground they do not hesitate, they do not pause to ask a handsome young shepherd standing near whether he, by chance, well disguised as a mortal, happens to be tending the flocks of King Admetus. They say nothing. They shoot, for they do not feel that immemorial doubt which will check almost any of us with the warning that possibly common things are not what we suppose, and that perchance we are overlooked, for what is eternal may be about. They are the avatars of a new dispensation, and have come to kill and possess. This new order abolishes not only shepherds and their homes, but the faith on which all homes have been built, and by which

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they have been supported, since—well, let us say since Cain was outlawed.

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If Mount Ida, why not Primrose Hill? Why not Bunker's Hill? The Swastika flag is hoisted over Olympus. There can be no exemption. A new dispensation is for everybody. There is no forbidden ground, there is not even inaccessible ground this year, once the altars are overturned, the lights are out, and the sanctities have lost meaning. All is open, and as it was in the beginning. In the beginning was the word, but with the denial of the word we can make a fresh start. Hocus has taken its place. Hocus can be creative, too, if it takes us in long enough to establish at vital points its engines for pumping lead overwhelmingly. It thus enables suborners and perverts to steal out, secret agents with facilities above the laws men have commonly acknowledged, to make sure no lights are lit again. Such a peril has never before threatened humanity. It is new in history. The Black Death killed men, but could not touch their good traditions. It did stop the building of churches, but only until craftsmen could pick up their tools again. The very point at which they begin to build anew may be traced in Europe. This latest plague kills not only the body, but destroys whatever animated it and gave it joy, its traditions, loyalties and affections, and faith. It crumbles religious houses, universities and

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political institutions, closes pantheons, poisons annals, burns art and letters, and leaves not even the old tales that children may dream and wonder. There is a break with what our fathers have told us. The remembrance of that is forbidden.

*

An English bishop has been telling his people that civilization, as we of the industrial revolution knew it, is with Memphis. It is no good deploring the fact, he said, though you want to, because it stares at us. He begged his folk to rise to a conception of a new civilization, another way of living. This, as he outlined it, did not seem hard, though never before attempted. It recognized that equality is impossible, but equity is not. His call was to nothing more intricate than brotherhood in well-doing. Though his lordship is late with the notion, we know he is right. A civilization, for which he had no tears, is done for; that part of his sermon is unanswerable. We had supposed that the prospect we knew would continue without pause and with but minor alterations while there was wind and weather. Its outlines were as elemental and constant as the unquestioned contours of the hills. But the very landscape, which we accepted as we did the morning sun lifting over it again, is changed. When we look for the comforting landmarks we knew, which our fathers knew, they are gone. Once a Cockney, idling out of

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Fleet Street into the wayside nook where a stone told him, Here Lies Oliver Goldsmith; then contemplative over neighbouring rails with the tombs of the Crusaders below, under the walls of the church which had been there ten centuries; turning a corner, and recalling that in that house Coleridge dreamed, and there Elia was born, and down in that garden began the Wars of the Roses, and in that hall Shakespeare took wine; remembering that he himself had gossiped with one of its old guardians who used to watch Dickens stride in and out of its gates; and in fact that English history, literature and law had peopled this London sanctuary with ghosts and memories, the Cockney, looking about him, in a little case from the day's affairs, could feel that though he was of no account, yet he had some consequence, nevertheless, for the long story of this place was his own, and its stones his heritage. Today that place is rubble. The Nazi engines have been over it.



When you heard that German tanks had forced the pass of Thermopylae, how did you feel? I do not mean what did you think. Thinking merely tells us that it is as easy for engines, if sufficient in number, weight and power, to force that pass, as to break through Paris or Timbuktu, when drivers can be persuaded to do it. The Nazis lumbered across the Sacred Way and reached Eleusis. They are at Delphi, Athens, Corinth and

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Chalcis. They occupy the islands of the Ionian and the Aegean. It is no good asking what we think of this; but how do we feel? The Nazis are either closing the universities of Europe, or else compelling them to a background which relates them to Ju-ju. And it was from these Greek coasts and islands that the light came by which our schools were planned and built. When a ship I was in was threading the Cyclades and the Sporades, I smiled when told the land ahead was the isle on which Leto gave birth to Apollo. That was Delos. The splendour and colours of the scene indeed suggested that a miracle might come about. I cannot smile at the story now. We saw, that voyage, Lesbos, Homer's lofty Skyros, and Patmos, of somewhat later interest to Christians; and that glorious island, Santorin, supposed to have grown from a clod of earth dropped by the Argonauts; and Naxos, where Dionysius found Ariadne, daughter of King Minos of Crete, after Theseus had proved that a hero may be no gentleman. Names only, just as is King's Bench Walk of London! Still, the great change is all very confusing. It is worse than when I was attending to the mingled echoes of Agincourt and Ypres to know that caterpillar tractors have ploughed up a Sacred Way, and that an engine we thought was going to benefit all mankind has blasted Westminster Abbey, and that Junkers have established machine-gun nests in the lands and islands of those legends which came

of the original stirring of the mind when men began to suspect that the look of things is deceptive; stories betraying our first surmise that what is seen veils a world unknown, and that there are powers with which men should not attempt to cope. They are but tales of the beginning, before the Iliad was written, and almost forgotten; but are we any nearer to an understanding of reality? One aspect of that reality is, we know, that those fables were sublimated into Greek poetry and philosophy, and so became part of Europe's intellectual inheritance, and in the body of a continent's life they still glow, of inextinguishable energy. You would call that fact as real as a steel foundry, or the latest figures of the stock markets, or the present situation in Germany's attempt at domination? It is a truth as real as the guns which now govern those shores and islands, where the sea, the woods and clouds, caused early men to look up from their trifling plantations of grape and pulse, and to ponder. We can be sure that not all the artillery of the new German order will put out the light which came from those seas, nor its bombs blot from memory the beauty of the world, nor solve the mystery of it.



One day a young mathematician explained to me—it was a day between the wars—the significance of control, as that was understood by a student of science. Control

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comes about, it appears, when you find a formula to make some selected natural phenomena act to your advantage. It means more power to your elbow. There was a note of triumph, which he took little care to repress, in his opinion of the superiority of mathematical exactitude over the airy generalities which satisfy people who have had but a literary training. All the surpassing wonders of this age of machines came of formulas, worked out by men who had neither the time nor the inclination to attend to Longinus on the Sublime. He smiled coldly when he told me that. I saw dimly then, for I am but a deficient physicist, that control is much the same as godhead. It is the governing of matter—if you know what matter is; and do you?—by mind.



My friend admitted this, but with reservations about godhead he was afraid I would not understand; so he did not venture them on me. It appears that Athens and Bethlehem have nothing to do with this problem. Still faintly amused, he pointed out that though in the beginning Jupiter directed thunderbolts from his seat on a mountain cloud, yet he has been deposed from Olympus. Man reigns on earth. We need bother no longer about what happened to Prometheus through presumption. We have much improved ourselves, and our stature has increased. In these later years, the thunderbolts are not

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only ours to direct, but their efficiency would surprise the old gods; who, however, are departed, having abandoned to us the benefits of control.

I see better now the tenor of my friend's words. Their drift, then unperceived, has moved towards the disclosure of attributes neither of us suspected they possessed. Only now do we begin to suspect that before we became so able in the use of fire and thunderbolts, and so confident in their disposal, it would have been advisable to be more nearly right in the use of words. We ought not to have promoted ourselves to the handling of lightning till after we knew the implication of control. Control of what? Power? Well, to what end? The source of lightning, when correctly sought and evoked, is efficient for many purposes. How often do we hear men and things praised for their efficiency! But efficient for what intent? Seemingly, the Nazis are highly efficient, and have great control. What does that imply? The names we give to things and qualities do not disclose their inherency; language, which was before the engines, is still shadowy and inadequate. There are many facts known to the senses, all with familiar names, of the nature of which we know little or nothing. As to qualities and the names we give them, we remember, for an instance, that honour, somehow, can have a queer

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gradual slide into treachery. This may happen because, among its various uses in speech, the word honour disguises self-interest so well that willing people are pleased to mistake it for noble aspiration.



It is true that some facts, all with common names, and long ago settled for easy reference into categories, will submit to our formulas and do our bidding when we press the right buttons. This is accepted by technical colleges as absolute and appropriate; in that they follow the example of Aladdin. We have grown so confident that we venture to call machines fool-proof. Even fools may apply them to guns or butter. The machines do not care. They obey. There is a chance, though, and more than a chance, by the look of things, that the nature of these facts is not entirely under our control, but remains outside our knowledge, though for causes we have ascertained it will obey our limited demands. These material facts seem to have inherencies our mathematics have not ciphered. They are not included in our descriptions and symbols. They have a destiny that evades the mechanical traps we set to catch some of their potency. It is probable the atoms dance to a tune we know nothing about. Our signs for space and number can measure the Galaxy, but no more. Our facts at last are lost, they become innominate, in that outer region of doubt and

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dread, whence, so unscientific primitives supposed, came the far faint warning of the pipes of Pan.



But Pan is dead. His ancient haunts are aerodromes. Still, though we have control where once the prerogative of Jupiter was unquestioned, and are so assured in the use of it that the Swastika flag has been hoisted over his throne, we are ignorant of the full fortune of the forces we are bestriding. We are beginning to wonder where they will take us. We get no answer to that from around. Pan himself never troubled his simple hearers more than this prepotent silence troubles us. No warning sound issues from it, now that we question it. For these forces we have conjured up appear to be running wild. We grow anxious. What was missing from our conjuring ciphers? We want to know whether the careless application of knowledge could spell doom; whether our busy cities are in jeopardy because the many inventions, releasing the giant forces by which the factory stacks grew and smoked, omitted some factor of first and governing virtue. We are questioning the dark about this, but nothing comes back but diminishing echoes, as when a stone sounds the unseen of a deep.



Though Pan is dead, though all the gods have departed, we remain staring at appearance, wondering over reality.

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The absence of august divinity from natural phenomena but deepens mystery, for though no man now looks for the apparition of bright Apollo to reproach barbarians with his glory, the queer thing is one could almost believe that imps and kobolds are stealing about, and even suspect the unseen presence of Belial himself, busily improving his prospects of his sons.

Strange, that the implication of a word should be as playful as the shift of light in an opal! But ought we not to have expected it? Words are to show what is in the mind, yet in the mind ideas glow and fade while instinct quarrels with knowledge and reason. How dull to that inner stir is a poor opal! Words are an expression of life, and its only rational utterance, their first and last purpose to make sense of the things about us. But if we continue to be uncertain of these things? Just glance in any public library at the stacks of philosophic works trying to explain what reality is! What is it? Nobody is sure about it yet. Our exasperating adventures and difficulties with reality's damnable accidents prove daily that reality can differ very much from that private picture of it which just suits our will to believe. Words are more difficult to manage than switchboards, because symbols do not exist to show how and why thoughts originate. We distinguish between things, and name each, clarifying knowledge for its accurate use, allowing

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nothing irrelevant, not even morals, which can be very disputable, to corrupt our aim, when we apply the logic of facts to our advantage. And then what happens? Too often, the very devil.



We are puzzled. Was anything wrong with the order of words that framed the matter? Did we slip somewhere in our argument? It is upsetting to find the outcome of logic can be as surprising as the magic of a rune in a fairy tale. For all practical purposes, when lightning is harnessed, when a team of solar rays is broken for the traces, man should be able to drive right on, master of his fate, if only he knew what that is. Somehow, though, after our prying into reality has prompted us to set down what we have learned in words and ciphers as exact as we can make them, we find our assortment of the alphabet was either an imperfect reflection of our desire, or else that reality has a disturbing essence not reckoned in our sum. Perhaps we had better say the trouble comes of both. That might induce a touch of humility; and at least humility and reverence before the nature of existence do not invite ill-luck. It is an important discovery in the great adventure of life when we find that our ciphers and words express but inadequately the nature of things, and strangest of all, that a wily purpose undisclosed in a close argument will

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emerge of itself to upset all calculations. Energy can be communicated, and the motion and smoke of it become part of the familiar landscape, yet the spirit which occasioned it was damnable, to judge by the consequences, or else there is no difference between right and wrong. Look at what has happened to our world through pure cleverness! It is enough to make one wonder, after all, whether good and evil are not conflicting opposites, instead of an inextricable muddle it is safe to overlook; and whether morals, though so very disputable, are not as absolute, if we could only discover a formula, as whatever it is that keeps poise and direction in the constellations.



So a doubt arises about Pan. Is he dead? Does he kick his little hooves in gaiety as he watches Nazi bombers superior to Athena's ruined court on that hill above Athens? If in the beginning he was but the image for simple souls of the mystery beyond, had we not better listen for his distant fun? The mystery persists, though it is too rare for our sophisticated and doubting minds to image, and even a satisfying order of words for it fails us. We may have no use for the gods. What room could we find for them among the things we treasure? At the same time, we should be idiots to disbelieve in the sons of Belial. Somehow, and quite irrationally, I am

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glad it is not the Union Jack which floats over the Parthenon.



You remember, you cannot forget, that embarrassing moment when we were with the children watching Peter Pan, and to save Tinker Bell we were asked whether we believed in fairies. What a mean trick! James Matthew Barrie, who was very high, never fell lower than in that moment. We shuddered. But the astute and nimble dramatist was quicker than a shudder, and got away with it. We do not believe in fairies; perhaps it is better to say they have overdone their gift for invisibility. Yet who laughs at the withdrawal of children at play, when they are outside the strict control of my friend the physicist, and have so transmuted the commonplace that it is not easy to say exactly where they are? Nobody would kick over the signs which show the innocents are happily oblivious in another dimension. What is more, if as practical people we do not believe in fairies, and of course we do not, we do believe in protons and electrons. Why?



Well, we are impelled to explain the matter somehow, and if not Puck and the rest of Them, then electrons. Most clever people believe in what the experts tell them. What else is there to do? In the old days, Puck used to

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perform little benefits about the house while the household slept, if he liked the place. He cleared out, and never came back, after he saw we could do better without him by pressing buttons and moving switches. Electricity never pauses over our likeability, but acts at a call, unless our account is overdue. The control our formulas have effected over lightning and all that works marvellously. It has produced good things to eat and drink in abundance so great that frequently people have to go without. Coffee and corn have had to be burned, because there was so much of both that people could not have either. Queer! Not even fairies could have worked more surprising magic than that. Think, too, of other revolutionary devices, warmly welcomed, though in England now they keep us awake all night, those once glorious gifts which, most strangely, have taken on the likeness of a death's-head.

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Puck's bedevilments were jocular, comparatively. But reason ordered us to dismiss the fairies, and we did so. Will reason now help us again, and explain why the benefits of science have become cruel? There must be a cause for this effect, and unable to resort to moral law, which is irrelevant in both research and power stations, we want to know the origin of this minatory transformation. It used to be said by our forefathers, in the super-

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stitious days when the Little People compelled prudence, that They were always helpful to children, and to kindly men and women. But woe betide cleverness, when it tried to fool them ! Ambitious and cunning people, who sought their magic for personal gain, were suitably trapped. This, it appears, was inevitable. Perhaps the instinct of simple and credulous folk was sound in this matter. As well as we can see what was behind their belief, it appears to have been that the elves had resources which were in the hidden springs of nature, so if you attempted to meddle artfully for your own profit, you found yourself up against everything. Even the trees made grimaces with the fun of it, when you were caught in the enchantment. They understood, from the roots up.



That is only a child's imagery for what seems true, that when ambition directs power no man alive is good and great enough to use, it is sure to bring disaster. It cannot be without cause that despite our knowledge of the earth, the more cunning we are in the use of it for particular privilege, the greater its reluctance to release us from the infernal spell which puts upon us the blight of want and despair, and now saddens daylight, fills the night with fear, and perplexes our labours on sea and land. The poet who exclaimed wildly that you cannot pluck a flower without troubling a star may have been as

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near the mark as mathematics will take us. It cannot be denied that when the elements are used for a selfish advantage the result can be as unfortunate as the downfall, related by the ancients, of those aspiring mortals who would have outwitted the gods. Physicists should give this problem their serious attention. It is no joke. Inadvertently we may have been obstructing the stars in their courses, and for that probably there is no corrective but to stop doing it. We see plainly enough that some dangerous propensity resides in the gifts of science. When not directed to good they show ominous qualities. Man discovered the way to fly, while still moved by ambition and lust for power, and the radiant sky goes out in Plutonian gloom.

We had forgotten that wisdom is not cleverness. Wisdom can seem illogical and childlike. It retains original innocence. It would not attempt to invent an antidote for an invited evil, but would merely ask whether a change of mind would not be preferable. The Nazis have made the sky obscene with their use of a remarkable device that had its original success in America, and now it becomes an inevitable duty to go aloft and clear away the horror; but only wisdom can make that clearance absolute and final.



We have to make a choice. As well as we know, the energies which support and direct the universe are

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beyond good and evil; but for a cause we need not waste time trying to discover, human life in its evolution has arrived at a distinction between right and wrong. We ignore that fact, in politics and engineering as well as at the altar, at our peril. The origin of the distinction, like that of life itself, is as obscure as the reason for the radiance of the sun. It could not have arisen out of nothing, we must believe that; anyhow, it is impossible to contemplate nothing. We may dismiss the old fables, those early attempts to embody the powers of earth and heaven which otherwise were elusive, but to dismiss the ancient notion that the gifts of the gods could become baneful to whoever used them to secure dominion over his fellow-men is surely hazardous. If too many of our neighbours are blind to that, then we may abandon hope. The aspect of the morning sky will remain what it now is, livid with the hue and torment of hell. We shall have chosen death when we could have chosen life, and life more abundant.

July 1941

THE MAYFLOWER SAILS EAST

July 1941: Where virgin earth is still being broken, and new towns rising in America, the *Mayflower* is as familiar a name as the Ark; as familiar, at least. The

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purpose of the voyage of both ships was the same. It was to preserve the good life. It was to carry a selected company out of a troubled world, to begin anew in a land where virtue would not be exposed to the blight of sinful antiquity. A sound plan. The Pilgrim Fathers sought isolation from affairs which wearied them past further bearance, and they found it. Their children still have it. Those Pilgrims voyaged better than they knew ; so very much better than we, whose forefathers stayed home, envy their descendants their precious isolation, which remains intact.



Of course we do not blame our forefathers who stayed home their want of enterprise, their lack of foresight. How were they to know that some years after they had disposed of their immediate troubles, by limiting the authority of the king and an institutional church, their homes would be only a few minutes' flying distance from the continent of Europe? We ourselves have only just discovered it. Our homes are as near as minutes only, and cannot be improved. We yearn for an isolation we shall never get. Too late now, in this contracted world. If we could, we would haul out our group of small isles and moor them, say, alongside the Bermudas, and then sigh in content under a sky less ominous within the aegis of Washington. Or so we feel, moodily, in this hour. And let no sympathetic soul wonder over that. Though

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it may sound like a complaint, critics who are safe can be assured that maniacal destruction has no fun in it, is indeed unpleasant, even to men and women able to face it, when they must.



So we in the east of the Atlantic can but wait for the bombers of the enemy to drop their daily loads. This causes wakefulness at night, in which we may consider our lot; and thoughts go faster in war. It is then that we deplore the absence, while waiting for the signal that the raiders have gone, of an isolation other people possess. A little later the thought occurs to us, perhaps as solace, that isolation means something beyond mere immunity from hostile aircraft. After all, that immunity is but relative, for there is no man nowadays who dares figure out the farthest range of those harpies with their infernal appetites. We sit thoughtful over Europe's tragedy, for we are involved in it. While waiting for the explosions and incendiaries to come nearer, we cannot help brooding over this war, this strange outcome, after forty centuries, of all mankind's hopes born in Egypt, Athens, Rome and Bethlehem; and we begin to wonder whether isolation, in the sense of being apart and safe, is not in fact a dream. We wonder whether it is a better refuge from the energy and restlessness of our fellows than any other castle built of air. Even were it possible to haul away our islands

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from Europe, and moor them in a warm latitude somewhere about 70 degrees west longitude, would that give us isolation? Apparently it would not. There is no escape. There seems to be no choice but to begin afresh on another planet, unless a fairly general agreement by mankind is found for a better way of living, and in communion.



Because, for one most important fact in this problem of isolating ourselves from the displeasing energy of our fellows, we note the *Mayflower* sailed east, long ago. We need not go to America. America is here. The *Mayflower's* return to Europe went as unremarked as her departure in 1620; and her eastward-borne freight is the awful addition to the heritage she carried away long ago to Plymouth, Massachusetts. How great an increase it is! How altered from its original nature! What astonishing changes it effects when in contact with old Europe! Everybody knows that ancient soil, long cultivated in a traditional way with native elements, becomes tired at last. It shows languor. It has done its work. It will not grow lavishly, as it did in early days, the accustomed roots and stocks. Yet plant new things in it and it rouses to life abundant. It is vernal earth again. And in our old soil new things have been sown. When America had given us hardly anything except the potato,

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which was not many years before we gave America the Pilgrims in return, our land magnified that tuber into a wonder. Since then it has become smaller potatoes. The great west, however, from as far as Los Angeles, has sent us much more than the potato, more even than tobacco ; though the last admittedly is a gift above rubies, since now we need cheering, often till daybreak again. Faith and tobacco !



We are told there is no certainty about the kind of ship the *Mayflower* was. No picture of her exists. I have not heard that her cargo manifest is preserved. If we could examine that shipping document, and note the marks and numbers of the cases, bales, crates, firkins, casks and barrels she carried, that would only tell us what a practical company of adventurers to a new land considered necessities of life. It is certain that all the goods recorded in her manifest were perishable, all were destined for the discard and the midden. That part of her freight did not last long. The papers of that famous ship, the evidence of her burden any officer of Customs would understand, omitted to specify those goods which the Pilgrims themselves valued above seed-wheat, above spades and fish-hooks.



Then what else did she carry ? Certainly conjectures

out of the Renaissance and the Reformation. There the Capitol stands at Washington as proof of it. No more than the eye of a tourist can make out that. The foundations of the Capitol are in Athens and Byzantium, for the thoughts of its American builders were continuous with what had been established in the Mediterranean. This means, of course, among other things, that democracy did not originate in the *Mayflower*, nor in a meeting of indignant Boston citizens. Birth and growth are never as miraculous as that. It would have been impossible, even for those original characters William Brewster and William Bradford, to specify the beginnings of the American Republic on their ship's bill of lading or in her log. They never thought of attempting it. They but faced a new horizon and the undiscovered, and had with them their heritage, its possibilities unguessed by them. It was uncounted amid the bulk of their precious material cargo. How could they think of democracy in the way a student does this week at Columbia University! But with their ship's burden was stowed that viewless beginning, along with seed-wheat and hoop-iron. Sir Francis Drake, who died in America not so long before the Pilgrims went over to it, did not formulate British Imperialism when, against Elizabeth's prudent national policy, he derided Spain's claim to half the world, and her power to keep English seamen out of it; yet his rebellious genius amounted to British Imperialism in the

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long run, and the run was as far as 1900 and the South African war, when it perished, at the end of its road.

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So we may fairly say that the American Republic was in the breath of life which sent the Pilgrims by many paths from as far as Leyden and its printing presses to Southampton, and thence across the Atlantic. Their venture was animated by the curiosity and challenge which some centuries earlier in Europe had released the mind from imprisonment by absolute authority and unanswerable dogma. It was not for nothing that they knew the same fields as Piers the Plowman, John Ball and William Tyndale. Many aboard would have had with them the newly revised version of the Bible. One voyager may have had Chapman's translation of the Iliad, published the same year. Another may have met John Selden, scholar and jurist, who eight years later was put in the Tower of London for signing the Petition of Right. Shakespeare had been dead only four years when they left England, and Milton was twelve years old. Charles Stuart came to the throne of their homeland five years after their departure, and so much had England changed since some of the Pilgrims heard the guns of the Armada that Charles was almost immediately involved in a fight with Parliament. The mettle of their pasture is a fact, though a fact that could not be included, distinctly marked, in their ship's manifest. We ought

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always to remember, when one of our prompt deductions from today's newspaper headlines appears to be perfect, and quite beyond argument, that the trend of things stirring about us, the fate inherent in opinions casually and commonly held, are never much easier to read than was the present war in the frustration felt by a melancholic Corporal Hitler of the defeated German army, who began to dream again an old German dream of lordship. It is also most unfortunate that the realists, to whom we prefer to listen, when anxious to learn where we are, and the way the world wags, are seldom right about it, and the unwelcome moralists seldom wrong.



The exploitation of the new western lands was certain, despite moral philosophy. Realists were busy upon them. The Spanish, Portuguese, Hollanders, French, Scots and English, had been getting what money they could out of America before the *Mayflower* arrived; yet but for the new resolve she brought with her on the importance of the individual, the right of a man to use his mind freely, though present in church, and the sense of his responsibility for the welfare of his companions, which he must place above the authority of trading companies backed by shareholders in the capitals of Europe, there might have been no great western democracy. Shall we, as hard realists, attempt here to estimate

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the probable survival value of such notions amid swamps and forests, Indians, and long winters, while energetic rivals, not at all interested in selfless ideas, were not far away? What, at a guess, would be the exchange value of those airy notions in hard times? One tub of butter? Well, there Washington stands as a sign that intrinsic worth is not always easy to estimate. One may know all the hard facts, and see nothing of destiny in them. What could not be weighed and measured, nor named in a ship's articles, what was useless against tomahawks, what even today is never quoted in any bourse in the world, can yet command attention and respect as far away as the Baltic and the China Sea. Therefore, at any given moment in history, what is reality?



To this hour, it is dangerous to presume upon it. Yet is there one of us, when provoked, who hasn't a strong opinion about things as they are? We are like that, and will defend that opinion with the more courage when we begin to fear its frailty. Sooner or later a cooler moment comes, and a quiet question has a chance to be heard. Then we notice that the look of things has a chameleon trick of merging into the wonder of existence, which remains unsolved. Nobody knows reality. Things as they are can be more deceptive than the smile of an Oriental. The curious moralist who advised us long ago that the celestial balance is upset when we are destructive

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on earth is as likely to be right about ultimate reality as politicians when confident they are making the best use of the proper elements for the benefit of their fellows; or they are until midnight strikes, when we all sit down to think things over in a general black-out, while waiting for bombs to burst. The truth proves then to have but slight resemblance to the well-considered and patriotic aims of familiar publicists.

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Many years ago, when I was first in New York, staying at a place called Holland House, I was taken to see a remarkable building called the Flatiron. To a European, who feared that buildings of more than four stories were overdoing it, the Flatiron was unique. Many years later, in America for the second time, from a liner's deck at dawn, I saw another New York. It looked like the exultant white city of an unknown race of beings. Common humanity could not build like that. From a distance, I hardly believed it. The place had become vertical; it accompanied the sky. I was the more astonished because the home town I had left behind me, London, was flat as usual, still horizontal. I have since discovered that America produced no more than 69,000 tons of steel in 1870, but 10 million tons in 1900, and nearly 52 million tons in 1937, and that of the latter it exported $7\frac{1}{2}$ million tons. So probably, on that second visit, I had done more than cross the Atlantic. I had

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reached a shore, not only of another continent, but of another age.

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I didn't know then, as I looked on, and I don't know now, the truth of it, but something was certain instantly. American architects, for one body of its artists, had abolished their portion of Mediterranean culture. It had no part in a new age. There are two active unseen powers we hear about that are said to be busily shaping us; one is called economic compulsion, and the other the new rhythm of life. These powers, besides increasing the number of lunatics per thousand of population—or so alienists tell us—are creating, with steel and concrete, new homes for men. Classical forms can be disregarded when cities may grow higher and quicker with new materials, and thus keep us all in harmony with life moving much faster.

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From this, however, certain things of first importance must follow. They cannot be included as items in building contracts, having no market value, so they get no publicity. One of them is that men and women, when concentrated into vast buildings instead of being spread out by families in separate homes, will lose individuality in uniformity. The immediate presence of so many of their fellows imposes new social conventions. A crowd has its own spirit, which intimidates any assertiveness by

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the person. A time comes, therefore, when to these people the first condition for their happiness and security will seem to most of them to rest on the need for maintaining a common opinion about it. Timidity will guide them. The Republic, we know, was born of rebellious individuality, but it begins to appear that physical science had brought about another revolution; boldness of thought has become of less importance than agreement with the multitude.



Pioneers, we know, must work in independence. Each man must test the nature of things with his own hands and brain, and stand on his own feet. But a modern citizen anywhere on earth, east of the Atlantic as well as west of it, too often a cliff-dweller in a lofty precipice of concrete, has parted from Mother Earth. He knows no more of her than he does of the moon. But he is ignorant of this recent complete insulation from the origin of his life because transport hides the fact. He never even surmises that he would perish, if transport failed. He is unaware, too, of a penalty for specialization, since men's duties amid intricate industrial gearing have become widely separated. The penalty is a social organism so vast yet delicate—in fact, world-wide—that all will go wrong with it if a few arteries are cut. And the radio, nightly, keeps his ignorance in agreement with that of his neighbours. He may be said to exist in a state of

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vague doubt and nervous apprehension. He attends to the news of the day in a questioning attitude, puzzled as to what is the matter with everything, and his doubt can be used without much trouble by those who know the way to do it; for his certain knowledge of what vitally affects him is dangerous in its insignificance.

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An American could fairly answer: "As for us, that is our affair, not yours. We can manage. It suits us well enough. We like it that way."

It is a view to which he is entitled. But how if he part himself from general human welfare? Civilization concerns him, too? It concerns all who dwell on earth. For that reason, do not suppose it is only steel in bulk which the *Mayflower* has brought back to Europe. That in itself would be mere waste without the notions to shape it to common use. There cannot be mass-production, as an absence of variety in manufacture is called, without standardizing more than machinery parts. Man himself must conform to a common standard. Not only the body, but the mind must get into uniform. As an instance of this, he must, we all know, accept everywhere today the same film for his entertainment, in tens of thousands of theatres in two hemispheres, for no better reason than that astronomical money was sunk in its production. Art itself must conform to low and rigid standards to have profitable distribution to the multitude.

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More serious than production in the bulk is the view of life it compels in us, if modern industry is to run smoothly and continuously ; yet we are ignorant, for the most part, that we have submitted, without a protest, without a word being said, to such a view and another destiny.

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Americans are probably unaware of the pervasiveness of their own atmosphere. That also is part of present reality. That cannot be isolated. It circulates, and it is electric and germinal. It is creating new standards on the round globe, sometimes with comic results. One day I was leaning on a ship's rail looking for a means to get ashore. We were off an unfrequented Malay island. Among the natives afloat in canoes about us was one who was unnaturally distinct. I thought I had seen something like him before. Wherever was it? A Dutch sailor beside me explained. "He goes to the pictures." That was it. I was looking at a bare-footed Malay in sombrero and chaps, who was a cowboy where there are no cows. It belongs really to another story, but I will mention here that everywhere in the Malay Archipelago, and all over the East, natives are entertained daily by drama, mainly Hollywood's, showing the activities and frivolities of white people, and for that reason we have lost an ancient credit for being superior to them in morals, and in several other important particulars. The credit may have been undeserved ; anyhow, it has gone. America distributes

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her opinions and ideas for common currency. There is no isolation for any of us from this potent liveliness.



My first visit to the Mediterranean, the region of earth where the signs of our civilization began to show one hundred centuries back, was near forty years ago. The origin of what eventually developed into London, Florence, San Francisco and Chartres was there, and so my earliest voyage is still in sharp memory. Your first view of an Ionian shore never fades. After all, it is not many years since I found myself at last on the route of Odysseus, and enjoyed hours when it was still easy to believe that there abeam of my ship was the land on which the best that America and my country have and know first saw the light. It seemed to me to be the very place. Song and dance, religion, poetry, science, politics, art and music, the way to live which would give content and happiness, from there all came. And on that voyage I found a rich variety in men, their dress, their homes, their temples, in their adjustments to circumstances, from the Tagus to Egypt. In that so recent year one could land at a different place whenever the ship anchored. Phoenician, Greek, Roman, Norman and Moor, had left their signs everywhere, even in the tongues. On an abandoned Sicilian hillside above the sea, where a white Doric colonnade stood amid caraway and other sere herbs, the

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hot silence did not mean that this was at the end of its days. The scene but admonished a lonely wayfarer that he had a tradition to maintain. He had been given a lamp, and should tend it.



But what nonsense it seems to us now, this talk of a lamp to keep alight! The tradition has gone. For let anyone try the Mediterranean now—well, better not try it till the mines and other explosives have been swept out of it. A new tradition is evident all over it. New lamps for old! I was there again, during the time when Mussolini was exporting violence to Abyssinia, and was astonished by the changes. It gave me as great a surprise as my second view of New York. For one minor thing, though on my first visit I had a passport, it was not asked for, except by the Turks, who were then in Tripoli of Barbary. Nowhere were the officials fierce obstructionists. They were casual and polite. You were free everywhere. You stepped ashore, if you wanted to. But I am not thinking so much of that ease of movement, though it must seem unbelievable to this generation. In those days one had liberty, but showed no gratitude, because unaware one possessed a good thing. And it was not the brisk uniformed fellow, either, with his automatic gun, who on a recent voyage through the Mediterranean stopped me wherever the gangway was

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let down to another concrete quay ; he was not the most startling of latter-day phenomena. The great shock came from the fact that, from Morocco to the Bosphorus, our age of science, in a few brief years, has shaped men and their cities to a new pattern, and the same pattern everywhere. The ladies of Constantinople, as it used to be called, could now pass along Broadway unremarked. They get what they want at the stores. So they do in Athens, Smyrna, Cairo, Seville. The more recent Diana of the Ephesians would draw no eyes in Oxford Street, London. If it is the unity of the world we are after, we are well on the way to attain it, in costume. A man naturally sighs over the sad discovery, when he reaches Ephesus, that the austere charmer, sister to Apollo, daughter of Jupiter and Latona, who occasioned St. Paul some trouble, is indistinguishable from any neat stenographer. Though let that pass. Forget, too, the rigorous restrictions, prohibitions, tariffs, passport requirements, and the suspicious fellows at all ports with guns at their belts ; and forget even the ominous airplane, appearing in the hitherto undefiled blue with its ugly way of dropping down to look at your deck ; a fearful trick that, giving one the sensation of being back in the dark ages, when anarchy ruled, and robbers were as frequent as honest men.

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No, they are all disheartening, but not the worst of it.

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The worst of it is that the earth, once abundant in variety, is becoming everywhere alike. You cannot make much of a difference with only steel and concrete, and the drive of money, to go upon. I remember my first African landfall, the tawny hills beyond, and at the bottom of a valley by the sea terraces of white houses topped by minarets. There was a smell of herbs on the offshore wind. That walled village was a maze of courts about a market, and I suppose it lived the life it had known for ten centuries. I hoped then a chance would come to be there again, some day, for it was unique, it was like nothing else I had seen before. In late years, the chance came. I was once more off that valley; but the town had gone. The engines have trampled it. They are very powerful. They can crush the identity out of Africa itself. Africa, too, is being cleared, swept, concreted, and made to resemble lands that are better disciplined. What I saw, instead of an ancient Moorish community, was a finished miracle in town-planning and engineering, docks, quays and warehouses. It would have won admiration from any progressive intelligence. Its natives have given up date palms, olives, goats and camels. They are now dock-labourers and lorry and crane drivers. And I thought, as I boarded my ship, may I never see this place again! Better luck, I promised myself, at the next port of call. Our freighter had about

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twenty ports of call, so one disappointment could be forgotten.



I was mistaken. Having seen that one, in a sense I had seen them all. That abominable mud, concrete, the delight of the unimaginative and idle-minded, for a fool can mould it, and it sets in frightfulness with the solidity of granite, has infected most of the shores of the Middle Sea. The worst of the stuff is that reinforced with steel it is indestructible. The public buildings and blocks of flats made of it are omnipresent, and are still rising fast. The once rich variety of the good earth has been given a universal and incurable leprous aspect. It seldom matters now where you are, in the South of France, California or Egypt. They are much alike in appearance, and in the souls and ways of their peoples. What else would you expect? It is the consequence of a common tyranny. Machinery reigns, and it is natural for us to assemble and bow down to obvious power. It is to recognized power that homage always goes. For that reason, industry and commerce have become more important than agriculture, and so the vast white boxes for stowing humanity into the least possible space near the power-stations are being stacked everywhere. They pile up under the Acropolis of Athens. They threaten Stonehenge. They are closing in on the Pyramids. You see them, blinding white and repulsive, in the cities of

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the tropics. Except in name, Madrid is no different from Birmingham or Chicago. A view of New York which astonished me, when I saw it first, has spread into a commonplace of the round globe.



Is there anything we can do? Nothing at all, except to worship a better idea. The time is here when we must either challenge prevailing power, or abide by it. With no change of heart, and no challenge, there is nothing for us to look to save this blasting uproar about us, and more to follow, and the increasing devastation of our only planet. We cannot isolate ourselves from a dominant notion. It crosses the widest oceans and the most closely guarded frontiers. And humanity, its connections and communications being as quick and intimate as they are, agrees that the principles governing material progress are superior to happiness and to a relish for sunlight in security, superior even to what we surmise in the temple. The gross materialism of our age has infected even the oldest culture in the world, that of China, where, before the war with Japan, the French dramatist, Francis de Croisset, witnessed in horror the destruction with pick-axes of a fourteenth-century building embodying some of the finest craftsmanship he had seen in Canton. It was the only temple remaining in a great effort to clear away the hampering past. He asked what would replace

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this old good work. He was told that technical achievements would do it, railways, factories, aerodromes.



“And your religion?” he enquired.

“It doesn’t fit in with progress.”

Then, as they smashed an ancient figure of Buddha, such as you may see in the Metropolitan Museum, New York, and in the British Museum, London, he wanted to know what they would do for works of art. “We’ll produce fresh ones, and anyhow, that is not important.”

Not important. Religion and art are one, and when they cease to be of importance to a community we may expect the worst, and now we are beginning to see what that is. If we abolish Apollo as a useless myth, what sort of a substitute is Gradgrind? I remember a Philadelphian I knew and respected, an architect of genius, who understood the spirit which sent up the cathedrals in the middle ages as well as he did comradeship. By chance, however—it was by chance—he had made a quantity of money, and bought an old house in France, to which he retired. It was the most beautiful house in which I have stayed. It was in accord, and so was its owner, with its Burgundian scene, a land untouched then by the years of the modern; and therein, in his gentle manner, its owner spoke to his few guests of a way of life, which would have been understood well enough in Greece more than

twenty centuries ago, and in China, too, till recently. What he said of architecture was proper to literature also, as well as to the church pulpit. One year, the French local authority carried its electric standards to the borders of his estate, an enclosure so quiet that you could hear the carp at play in the moat. The local engineer was doing this for the American, who could now have his accustomed electric light. But No, the American exclaimed, and smiled. "I came here to get away from all that." He continued obstinately to light candles for his guests when they retired; and exactly right candlelight was, though at first surprising, and even alarming, in that ancient house with its recesses and lofty rooms. Those apartments, after sunset, had known only candlelight, which was as friendly to them as was the morning sun.



At this point there will be a protest. Isn't that French house irrelevant? And what has that Philadelphian to do with the story?

Very much. He was at the beginning of it, as it were, and must see it through. Since the *Mayflower* has returned east, she had better discharge all she has in her. That should include, besides bombing planes and other technical improvements to the hurly-burly, a few of the rarer notions, without which life is no better than loud activity without direction, except to the bottomless.

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When the Pilgrims left old England, the chief part of their equipment were ancient values that came to light again with the Renaissance. No doubt the pioneers were largely unconscious these were in the ship, for what were they but the urge without which the *Mayflower* could not have set forth? This reminds me that I was reading, in a recent American book, a close argument for America's abstention from an attempt to solve Europe's problems. These, I gathered, are different in nature from America's. This abstention, I understood, would allow America the leadership of the world, when Europe had finished battling.



Leadership, it is plain to us all, is what the world needs. Let it come. But might not the world fairly ask, To where and what? Nor is it easy to see how a leader can isolate himself from his willing followers, unless he keeps out of sight, which will not greatly help those he leads, as they will follow him with difficulty. If technical achievements are to displace temples, even in China, and the world's artists have to stand aside while concrete is mixed, it means simply the abandonment of the best that man has thought and done. It means that the story of Bethlehem is abolished with Apollo. Plato is less than a chemical factory. All that unprofitable stuff goes. Its persuasion is silenced at last; lost in the drone of the

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dynamos! Such a prospect would drive an atheist to find a god to whom he could appeal.



Yet I don't see how America, the origin of technical achievements, can possibly abolish the very virtues without which there could have been no Republic. Abolish her own foundations? One day, in that old French house, not many years after the last war, I was rebuking my elder from Philadelphia for the wrong his people were doing to Europe. For one thing, there was Hollywood. It was coarsening English writing. Taking the heart out of it! Making the sentiments smell either of synthetic violets or onions. The screen was cruder than the discarded novelette. I advocated, bitterly, a complete European isolation from the plague. He pointed out in reply that Hollywood's success is due mainly to superior camera art, which the public understands. That was significant. The public, everywhere, knows enough to recognise on the screen the better form, and to prefer it. The content would come later. The cameramen were ahead of the film directors, that was all. He went further. He declared that America presently would teach me how to use my language; and then played a trick, with a trifle of typescript. Who wrote that? he asked. I could not place the extract, but suggested that it was from Sir Thomas Browne. Said the Philadelphian,

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"I knew you would say that. Actually, it is from Melville."



There it is. Sir Thomas as a boy of fifteen might have watched the Pilgrims depart. You never can tell where the word will again appear. The wind bloweth where it listeth. I then had to admit, to my American friend, that nothing better was being contributed to English literature than America's offering, just before her Civil War. Indeed, has anything better been added since? If the Declaration of Independence had resulted only in Herman Melville, then the revolution would have been justified. It was pioneering, if you like, when Whitman, Melville, Emerson and Thoreau, were writing. Compared with their contribution, building railroads and telegraphs, and breaking up the wilderness, were fairly easy.



I know that Emerson and Thoreau are dusty today, but that is only what one would expect. It is not by chance that the first books a visitor sees when entering Emerson's study at Concord are the works of Plato; and Plato is less easily applicable to things as they are than Karl Marx. As for Thoreau, he goes even further back than old Athens. No wonder some people think he posed! For Zoroaster, for the wisdom of ancient Persia, to appear in Massachusetts, questioning those

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matters to which we all attach the greater importance, is enough to puzzle anyone. It puzzled R. L. Stevenson, who said Thoreau was a shirker. It makes modern critics impatient, though they do admit grudgingly that Thoreau wrote as if he were a master.



Of course he did. That is what he was. A shirker could not have had the influence, and maintained it, that Thoreau's works had upon young readers and thinkers in England, over forty years ago. Many of them carried his books about, as a sort of testament. Thoreau was responsible, in part, for the insurgence of political thought which followed the Boer War. A man who posed could not have managed that. It seems to me as good a return as an American could make to the land of his ancestors; and Thoreau's people used to be at home in the Channel Islands. His books, stored in a New England attic, because they were not wanted in their own day, some years later helped to change the acceptances on which British political life is based. As miracles never happen, we must find a word for that. And now, since America is thinking of leading the world, when the guns cease to fire, has she considered the direction in which she will go? For the truth seems to be that this curse of war as we know it is the direct outcome of technical achievements, which require oil fields and

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metal mines; it is the consequence of industrial development uncontrolled by a knowledge of right values. One man leading the German people could not have caused this harm, if the rest of us had not lost the knowledge of the proper use to make of life. Where is the spirit which took the *Mayflower* westward? That might quicken us. A meagre beanfield in peace, and the smell of the morning earth, would be better than great possessions while we sleep in dug-outs, fearful of the night sky and the morrow.

August 1941

A YEAR OF IT

August 1941: The morning light on the upland is so free and cheerful that night's ambiguity is cleared. The heights stand firm, with the sea as eternity under them. I notice also that time is at work on the war. Its quiet attention to the affair is becoming visible. The raw rim of the crater where the bomb fell behind the house is already softened by sprouting thistle, ragwort and sorrel. In the innocence of morning, the shadows of old fears—of the disquiet of that night, for instance, when for seconds out of the universal noise we heard one brute coming for us, and miss—are all but gone. Today I don't

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remember much about it, only that the house made an effort to go, but changed its mind. The man we really want, to remember, and to tell us later what it meant, is Dante; failing him, time had better work over it, and the grass grow.

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Glad of the assurance that time needs no encouragement, I went up later to see the cavity. It used to be a dead and ghastly warning, but it is being persuaded, it is beginning to agree with the landscape. Its bouldery depth is steep, but it possesses a pool now, a bright eye, so I clambered down. At the bottom the air was warm and still, the air of generation. Where the huge explosion was, life has begun. The water was tepid, and stirred with creation. A frail water-spider, the first I have seen, has ventured in after the bursting steel. And in the rubble about the new pond, associated with a dance of today's gnats, were scattered numerous fossils of the Lias, *rhynconella*, *terebratulina* and ammonite. Those shells of a sea which flowed here aeons before the earth was ready for us and our goings-on, when only the dragons of the prime were active, are looking up again at the same old sun, brought out of the dark backward by the violence of a young Nazi; whose own name is lost, for he then plunged into his contemporary sea.

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Take the hour and the latest news, take only what is

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important at the moment, and a sense of frustration amid general lunacy will get you down, if you let it. There the damned impediments to a rational existence still are and more of them. They pile up. Where is a way out? There is no escape. The worst of war is the imprisoning monotony of it. Even in quiet interludes vigilance must be kept against the coming of you don't know what, though sea and sky are empty, and the smoke of soldiering is only that of the cooks. You feel like a fool, but it is expedient not to be one. Stoop in the garden, forgetfully, for an inspection, the day being deceitfully windless and blue, and the chill of the shadow falls from a cloudless sky. The abrupt utterance of multiple machine-guns is of extreme fury.

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I climbed out of the crater, and stood watching a flock of starlings on the turf among the cattle; birds and beasts ignored the roaring overhead of a squadron of our fighters. And I paid the less attention to the flying engines, except to admire the close geometrical pattern of their formation. The nerve and skill of those men of the air make no concession to prudence, not an inch. I do not watch the men aloft in concern, as last August, for I have seen them in action, and know they have mastery. There is no apprehension today when they pass. We know they can do it. Yet, at night, when the radio recites the day's work in war, you will find the

other listeners lifting their eyes to you when, at the end of a recital of tasks accomplished, the voice falls, and adds, "twelve of our bombers have not returned."



A year ago today I should have watched those aeroplanes in anxiety. The contest for possession of us had begun. We stood in the streets, in the fields, and looked up. Many invisible engines patterned the sky with a delicate lacework of white lines slowly evolving and increasing in graceful loops and spirals, all you could see of battle, and from out of it a shape would form and grow, and fall headlong flaming. A year ago, this trifling island was much too close to a continent occupied by triumphant enemies. From North Cape to Finisterre we were beset. The Atlantic was at the back of us, and that was all. Our army was rescued from France, but its guns were not; and, though you face it, destiny makes no sign. Yet I suppose destiny is not in the stars, and absolute, but is subject to will. If challenged, it must change. A year ago we were alone. Aid was out of sight, except for what went on in the clouds, and that was all but viewless, as a rule, though heard well enough. No other aid would come till too late. Yet somehow, out of the conspiratory blue, out of clandestine occasion, aid has come, as decisive as judgment.



Whence came it? Well, whence come fellowship and

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generosity? We see humanity's affairs displaced, and rioting to an unknown end. Appeals to what is cruel and hateful bring response that dismays reason, earth's fissures and the dark corners of the mind erupting lies everywhere, as if the devil's runes had been read. But how miraculous also can be the defiant word! Baffled men look up. By an inadvertent sign, despair is stayed; for men don't want to die in chains. Hope may sink to a faint glim, but it will resist all blasts of the facts, a principle of undying life. In secret, its cherished point refutes midnight. Though wrongs so change a land that familiar landmarks are false, and all intercourse is heartless, here and there a clod will hide the beginning of resurrection and revolt.

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I recall only now that more than a year ago, when row-boats and launches were getting the British army out of France, a wrecked land, I met nobody in London who questioned what had to be done next. The only doubt was, in a day or two, whether the French fleet was against us as well as the German army. We learn today that away from our shores it was judged we would recognize downfall, and make what terms we could with the conquerors. What else was there to do? Yet at home I never heard a word about it. Nobody saw it. Nobody could have heard of it. Barricades in the streets did not suggest it to them. They did not even know that they

were not thinking of it. There were no heroes either, and no heroics. Men departed, without saying why, to the nearest recruiting office. My people do not see, to this day, that it concerned anybody else when they looked out, noticed disaster as if a wet day were setting in, and went on doing whatever the job was. It was a generous word in a broadcast from London by Dorothy Thompson which drew my own attention to the curiosity. It appears that, all the time, we were being watched.

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Is there not a deal to be said, after all, in favour of simple faith? Though it be all unconscious in the ordinary man, it can animate. It is true that our pride, or plentiful thick heads, or both, and a recollection of ships and the sea, all that, may have helped to fix an attitude to fate which had a miraculous outcome now clear for all to estimate; but that outcome was no more devised than the unpredictable ever is. Nevertheless, it is now seen that in that simple acceptance of destiny, to do the best with it, Fascism was defeated.

As for the distance a little candle will throw its beam, I doubt, for another thing, whether we see yet the full range of Roosevelt's counsel to "cut out the dollar sign." That was more than an instruction to ease the difficulties of a debtor. It has never happened before. We may be sure that sour and sterilizing comment will do its worst, for bigots we have always with us, that daft compound

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of ignorance, conceit and mischief. No nation is free from them, nor ever can be, for dross in the gross is natural. Yet a new thing is certain. The head of a great state abolished with a contemptuous gesture the most gnarled and ancient of the bars to friendship. The cash-nexus went. It was an instant release of power. In that revealing of unity in a cause above the claims of the counting-house, the old jealous bickering and thwarting vanished from between two peoples. They were no longer apart; well, say they are now close enough to feel the troubles of each. Sympathy had a chance to flow freely. A word did it.



The art of diplomacy, hitherto, has been devoted to the ancient game of crabbing. It studied to increase the odds. Its part in affairs has been a fastidious endeavour to check the vulgar circulation of life about the globe. For the advantage of human intercourse, it believed inhumanity to be highly beneficial. Now we have seen with what ease an enlightened statesman can liberate the instinctive trust and good will of his fellows. It is with relief we see it is not more dead lumber we need piled up between us, but less. Since light is released, and we view each other better, let us make no mistake about it, as we did in 1919, nor allow our politicals to make it.



In that year a door for the deliverance of men, found

not without cost and difficulty, was opened, but at once shut. It was, in fact, slammed. The echoing finality in its bang depressed us into apathy. We retired, petulant and rather abusive, each to his old national designs within the jealous bounds of privilege. The consequence of that folly is our present preoccupation. Men perish daily, and in hosts, because of it. And it would be gentlemanly not to regard death and mutilation as an historical abstraction, distant, dry and innocuous, and no more disfiguring our own doorstep than the drainage of plague in Thibet. Blood can be seen issuing, the desolation stinks, and the cries of personal agony are heard. Do not doubt that this infection, this poison from decaying life and labour, will enter our abodes and touch our bones. The fault will spread to its origin. Each one of us is answerable, and should accept. We had forgotten that democracy means us. Each is responsible for all. Cowardice in government is our own. The wheel comes full circle; and the wages of cynical indifference is death.



Another chance for us is here, after twenty wasted years, and this time it arises in urgency out of the tumult. That means, I suppose, it is a last chance, for one can but guess the date of another is in the Ides of March. If we lose it, then we are lost; it is as well to be plain, while there is time to save ourselves.

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The ocean separating this country from America is today our communication, part of a common order, kept by two ensigns with one purpose, the safety of peaceful men. That is a rational act, when it benefits everybody but evil-doers. Exclusive privilege kept by guns is as spurious as plenary inspiration, but an agreed protection of commerce on international highways is as ordinary and necessary as a policeman on patrol; and is there no reason to safeguard our inheritance of the things of the spirit? But whether it be shop or temple, or both, if our peoples are of one mind about it, then their purpose is unassailable by any conspiracy of envy. And battle is but transient.



It has been my own emotion, so I suppose other travellers have felt it, but the sight of the American emblem in strange waters has always affected me as if it were next to my own flag. Do we not know, though we grudge admitting it, that this war, with its corrosion by substantial and mental filth from Shanghai to Bordeaux, would never have begun had others been aware that American and British ships, as sure as sun-up, would have orders for common action should any power hoist the skull and cross-bones? Of course we know it. Then why not admit it? Is not taking care that peace be kept an object suitable for intelligent men? Predatory rulers hungry for more control do not hesitate to take it, when

confident they can hold it. What is the use of friendly peoples having a better ability, if they fear to use it till the ability is lost? The truth is, except to the atrabilious, that by not doing what easily we could have done, we have allowed the wilderness and pestilence to invade civilization and destroy culture over half the earth. Casuists could raise well-informed and intricate answers to that, and they will, for no man enjoys taking blame for what is bestial, but the direct minds of ploughman and mechanic, better used to observing cause and effect, will own to it that what we asked for we have.



What we have, what we see, is the murder of the life we knew. Let us keep the original salt in words for this. But there is far worse in it than murder. The very memory of what was good flies in the wind with the dust that was habitations and orchards, and the desert replaces the university. Even language decays. Men fear to use the right words, so the rot in the tongue speaks with the authority of disease, and names as Order the obliteration of the humanities. I know this European reality is unbelievable, because I am a witness, and it tangles and dismays all I had supposed was established by ancient law and custom as proper to man's sight and understanding. You know how the vagaries of a portentous dream make no sense, for though it appears to have information

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and logic, the thing seen is outside space and time, with a significance sombre and dubious.



The sights of this war are the same. You must doze off in a London shelter on a raid night to know that we are shadows, and circumstance phantasmal. You arouse, puzzled by impossible chiaroscuro in a confined space, smelling the smell of the grave, unbending with difficulty to overcome what perhaps is rigor mortis, while hearing the blaring of Tartarus. The profile of a stranger, a kneeling girl—when did she descend to join us?—shows dimly, and she is laughing quietly. You hear her telling someone unseen that she woke, put up her hand, and felt the earth close to her nose. Did he hear her scream? She thought she was buried alive.

A man mutters. There is a space of silence, until come another series of volcanic bursts. The grave shudders. The girl still kneels, apparently in a shroud, and she is still laughing quietly, to herself now, or else sobbing, maybe both. The bass of the man mumbles, "Forget it." "I can't," she whispers, "I want to, can you find this pin at my throat?"



To make sure you are not underground for ever, you crawl up, and out. It is not easy. There is brilliant light without, but it is intermittent, alternating with blindness, and the tortuous upward way by which you arrived

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leaves you uncertain of direction. This is what used to be the open air. Here you are again. Nothing can be made of it. Uncertain lights disclose momentary shapes you do not recognize. You stand amid flashes from nowhere, as if numerous metallic doors were opening continuously to release a subterranean incandescence, and were thundering back on their hinges to be at once burst open again. It is London and its guns. A red glare far away holds in one area a tier of clouds. There is a groaning out of night that increases to an overwhelming roar. You have no time to dive underground, but the bombs erupt some streets away. You thought it was your knees that shook, and do not blame yourself, but it was only the earth in repugnance.



The first sight of the scene under the sun next morning rebukes you. Then it was but a nightmare? No. It is advisable not to go into that doubt. Explore it, and you may uncover enough to perplex views that you had supposed would abide all questions. There was a shipping parish I knew, and its past, somehow, was mine. I had felt myself actual there with the adventurous days of the great trading companies, the frigates and the clippers. I went into that place recently, having a doubt. Home and school had been there; but soon I saw I need not look for them. These my familiar ways? I was appalled. "And the places that knew him, shall know him no

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more." But how if he remain, and the places not? What then? It is a reversal of the natural. Or perhaps centuries had trafficked past while I was quiet, and I was only a ghost returned to wander among the relics of a forgotten life. Here I could see that the work of mortals, and the things they love, cannot be kept by affection. The dust will have them. There must be more ghosts in London than ever, now, wandering unseen and alone, seeking what they knew, but will never find.

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It will not bear thinking about, not yet. Dolours must ease, and the mind be at rest. Reconciliation takes time. Meanwhile, as a beginning, I am trying to be a forgiving man. It is necessary to forgive before we begin to think anew, and there is much to forgive. For one thing, one hard to forgive, do you see the reason why so much of Europe is ashes and shambles? The reason is simple. It has nothing to do with politics, imperialism, economic necessity, living space, nor any of the muddles which fine theories declare land us in conflict; nothing at all. It is simply because in all European communities except one there was no will to war. That is the reason. Our fault was that we were peaceable; and worse, that we let it be known. Our enemy's confidence that he could take what he wanted came not of his strength. It came of his knowledge that his neighbours were so humane that they shrank from violence. He thereupon made

greater uproar with his ironmongery to shock them. He saw they were reluctant to fight. They had had enough of that—too much of it; and he invested in Europe's horror of more dead bodies.

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His neighbours, for their part, persuaded themselves that it was safe to dismiss as an orgy of self-indulgence this new outbreak of German glory. It would pass with exhaustion. They hoped, therefore they believed, that those melancholic processional hordes with banners trumpets and drums meant no more than that the Germans across the road were enjoying themselves in the way Germans oddly prefer. Most of us had weakened, too, in an old faith, had all but lost it, though Thor lived on. We had forgotten that god, with the rest of divinity. Hitler knew that he and his like had caught everybody else at a juncture in human progress when we were irresolute while considering what we had better do with our earth, so vastly improved by new knowledge, yet worsened for men. While we hesitated, with more concern for welfare than for war, the Nazis struck; their tribes erupted, and smoke was billowing from their line of march. It is hard to forgive murder and destruction made the easier through using the natural trust men have that decent instincts are shared by all.

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A year ago the smoke was heavy over much of Europe,

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and the savage rejoicing of the plunderers was all we heard out of the smother. The turn of our islands was next, and we were waiting. The great decisive battles in the sky which followed, over London and its suburbs, "from Hammersmith to Dungeness," when Hitler's imperious air-squadrons foundered to further rejoicing, but not his, told everybody concerned that civility had a chance now, if honest men would take it. This they began to do, though slowly and doubting, because falsity in long use had so rotted language that life and its defilement looked much alike. The ambiguity in words and opinion had gone far to paralyse wit and good intent. Recovery of faith was slow, though old cities and their treasures continued to burn, burn with their inhabitants.



One Sunday morning last June, a deceptively calm and bright morning, in nature's ignorant way, we went to the wireless box to release the news from everywhere. We did not expect either gladness or grief; we had no expectations; a beleaguered garrison becomes hardened to all but the great shocks. The first word we heard brought us up all standing. At dawn, that day, Germany invaded Russia.

The wild surmise of Cortez was nothing to ours. What did this mean? Did Hitler know more about the Russians, to their disadvantage, than had come our way?

It might be so. His malign cunning has become a legend. Either he was sure he could do it, or else he was committing suicide. We remembered falteringly that Stalin had shown undue haste and anxiety to please the Nazis, after the Balkans and Crete were submerged. That Hitler was shooting his friends so soon after declaring, before his own people, that eternal peace was established between the Russians and the Germans, was nothing whatever, not even treachery. He has no rule but lycanthropy. You might as well censure the doings of the plague on moral grounds. One thing only was clear ; Hitler must have judged he could safely turn east, and leave our execution to a more convenient season.



It was as if destiny had sounded a loud trumpet. But with what purport ? The tranquil Sunday morning made no other sign ; only a peacock butterfly was sunning itself on the buddleia by the window, and it vanished as someone in the room began to wonder aloud. Was another country going the way of Germany's neighbours ? If it were, and all Russia's wealth from as far as Vladivostok should flow to Berlin—what then would happen to us ? Did this mean war in perpetuity ? An answer was not ventured. We knew only that our leader would speak to us about it that night. I did remember, as one remembers in awe the large repose of antiquity, that Russia, like China, like the Himalayas

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and the sea, has managed, so far, to survive all changes in the weather.

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Now, my faith in Winston Churchill as a leader in this war—it fits him perfectly, this particular war—is as old as Stonehenge. It is hereditary. But, while waiting for his message—there were many hours to wait, for I had counted them—it was impossible not to recall the evidence of an antipathy in our midst, probably invulnerable, for everything Russian, except its old literature, ballet and a few dishes.

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Though I have never been to Russia, yet I can claim no firm knowledge of it; but, perhaps because I am an old propagandist myself, I was never able to feel the fashionable antipathy for Moscow. The invasion of Finland, though it was excused by Communists using the arguments of imperialists, was infamous; and that we can see afterwards the reason why a crime was committed never justifies crime. That act was the more startling because until that year the business of the Russians had kept them indoors, strictly attentive to their own affairs. As well as we could read Stalin's ideas, one was that Naboth was welcome to his vineyard,

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There remained always the Russian people, despite the

spoiling of Finland, and it was easy to retain the belief that there must be wit and character of the highest order prevalent in a folk which gave us Pushkin, Tolstoy, Chekhov, Dostoievsky, Gogol and others of that order, and so recently. Nor does it require more than a trifling resource to the intelligence to see that a people who from nomadism and pastoral ways jumped overnight a full century of industrial progress, measured by the western scale, could not all be docile half-wits, requiring our pity. Moreover, one gets to know the expert interpreters of other nations from the vehemence of their dislikes. A fairish experience has taught me that it is not unusual for an observer of a strange spectacle, however spacious and reserved it may be, to respond to little in it, except the oddities which conflict with his own habits and prejudices. That is why I read the stories brought back from Russia by my contemporaries as I did the *Thousand and One Nights* when a boy; there is truth in it all.



All very well for me; but how about the august clubs in Pall Mall? And our Premier's associates? What a gorgeous mess we shall be in tonight, I thought, if prejudice has more to say of this new aspect of reality than understanding! And America? You never can tell how a full moon will affect the tides of human emotions. Fate depended, as ever, on choice. But for mankind the choice now was final. We were at the last

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pass; whether back to the void of old night, or to continue in reason in our adventure towards a kingdom that might be? It depended on a word.

If we have not thanked Providence for it let us do so now, that at nine o'clock that night of June 22, 1941, we heard a man speaking. Winston Churchill swept away all but the essentials. He called to the Russians to hold; we were with them. As we listened, we could hear the barriers fall between two estranged peoples. It was certain, before that day was out, that if Hitler could not unriddle the Russian enigma before the snows met him, and no man has done it yet, then he would join the company of great conquerors in the coldest deep of Hades.



It is still far from winter, as I write. The swallows are here, and the harvests are not yet gathered in. Yet as for those Russians, if ever again I am called a Bolshevik, I shall not protest my innocence; I shall accept the insult as a garland. The Russians die for us without complaint. For us, I said. For you, for me. What greater sacrifice could men make? It is true they cannot help themselves, but when challenged they made the answer of free men, and it was for us also they made it.

The pattern in events is emerging. This war, we see now, transcends the defence of democratic institutions. It is above self-interest and national interest. It has no

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concern with frontiers. All social, economic and political divisions, the miserable signs of personal and national ascendancy, have vanished since it is manhood itself that is threatened. Monarchs, hierarchs, presidents and premiers come down in it to the same choice as the nobodies. Their souls are no more valuable, and that is the simple value which must be defended or go. This challenge is to manhood. This war is the last phase of the war which began in 1914, and is for mastership or fellowship, as was prophesied long ago.

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Who is for the fellowship? Whether or not our earth, when this tribulation is past, will become the place which the dreams of good men have told us it could be, at least here we are, free to make it so, if we will it, free to decide whether we shall be subject to the gun, instead of keeping to the order to which men have attained, and to pursue our quest of the city not made with hands.

All the doors of the mind are open. There is no return. It is too late for regrets, reproaches, recriminations and recourse to precedent. The past has lost arguments, claims and privileges. We have no power to go back. There is no authority now but the trifling voice of conscience. And what is conscience, without fealty to our neighbour? The Chinaman dying in his unseen

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mountain, the Russian peasant on his prairie, watching his home burn, are our neighbours, and to be aware of that, in full understanding that one's own body is hurt, is a release of the spirit with greater power for good than is in all the systems of politics. We have lived a century, and witnessed its events, since last August.

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